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Liberalism's Foreign Policy Fantasies

BY CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

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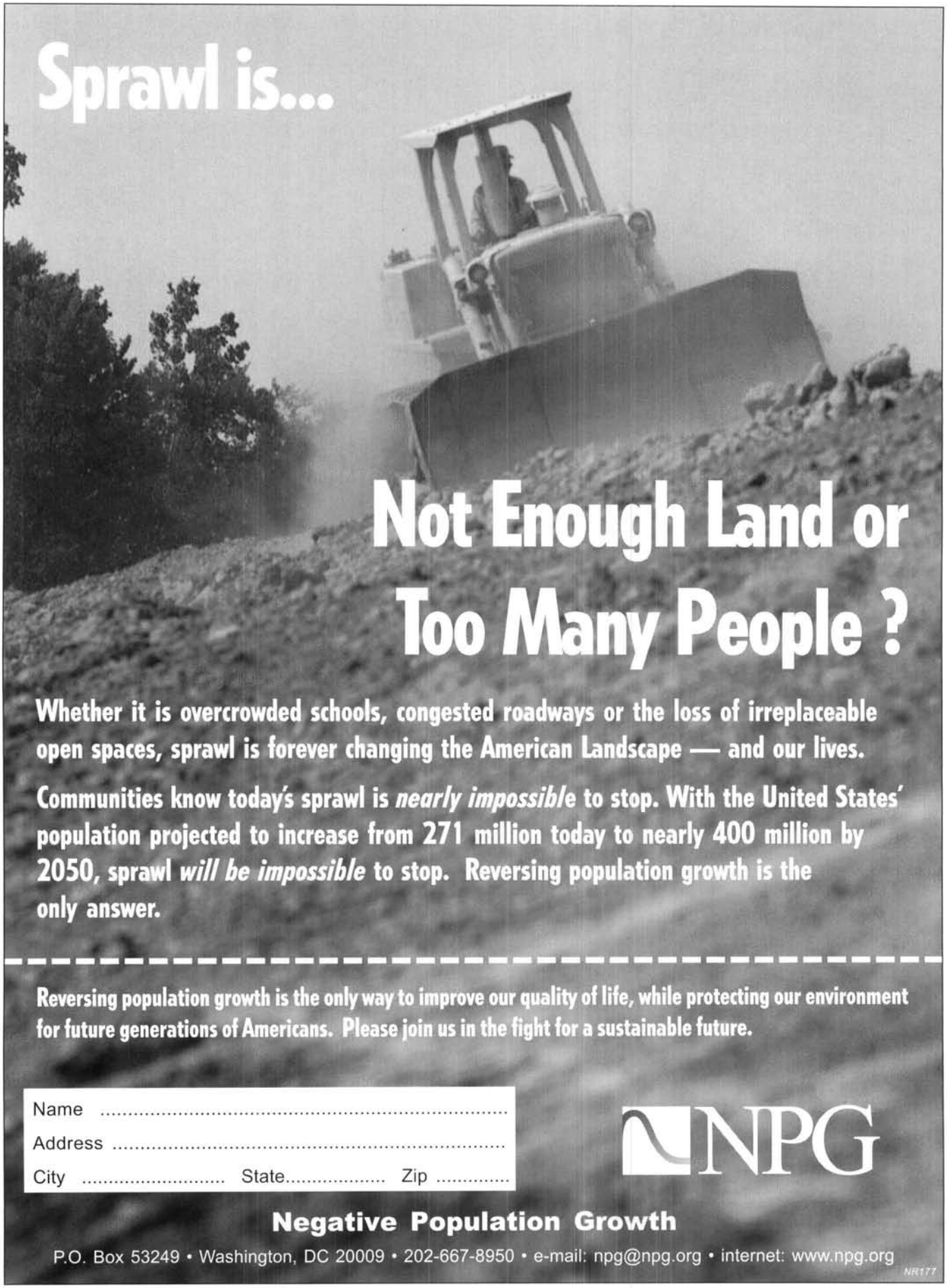
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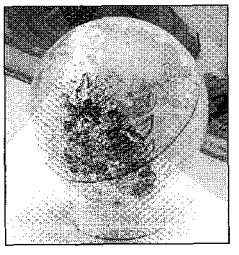

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CORRESPONDENCE

Materialism

To the editors:

For Jeffrey Rosen, the central question facing the Senate during the impeachment hearings was the materiality of Clinton and Lewinsky's testimony in the Paula Jones deposition ("Material Girl," February 8). But Rosen's question is itself immaterial. Once the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that this civil sexual harassment case could proceed, and after Judge Susan Webber Wright, pursuant to this Supreme Court ruling, ordered the president to provide testimony regarding his sexual relationships with public employees (hardly an unusual discovery request in sexual harassment litigation, particularly in cases of public servants or military personnel), the die was cast and the rules set.

Clinton filed no appeal to Judge Wright's order, prior to or during his deposition, questioning the general materiality of such sexual relationships—a critical oversight if the materiality of his testimony is now to be argued.

GREG FRIEDMANN
Ashburn, Virginia

To the editors:

I find it absurd that Jeffrey Rosen would argue that *(a)* Clinton and Lewinsky were entitled to decide for themselves whether their liaison was material to the Jones case and *(b)* they were legally entitled to lie about it if they decided in the negative. Rosen is without grounds in paralleling this case to the matter of Lundwall and Ulrich, since what Lundwall and Ulrich allegedly "withheld" had never been specifically requested. By contrast, the Jones lawyers said exactly what they wanted from the president.

G.R. PATERSON
Wilmette, Illinois

To the editors:

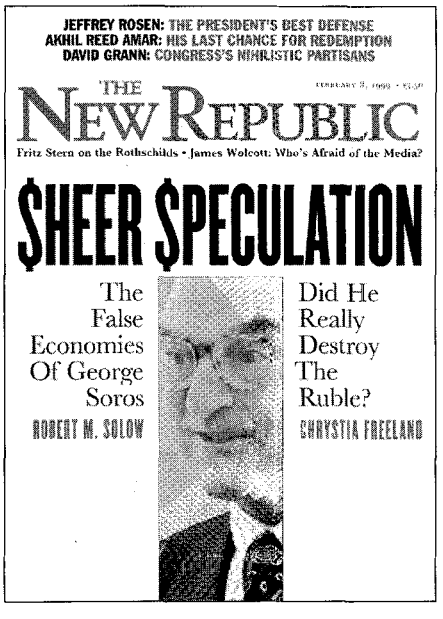
Jeffrey Rosen's discussion of the "materiality" element of the crime of perjury does not prove that the key issue before the Senate was the materiality of Clinton's lies. It demonstrates, rather, the folly of the House managers' position that makes testimonial materiality a sine qua non for removing the president from office. The requirement that knowingly false testimony must also be material—"that it must relate to the issues in the underlying case in a non-trivial way"—is sensible given the purpose of the law of perjury, which is to protect the integrity of judicial fact-finding. But the grounds for presidential impeachment should be determined according to the purpose of the impeachment rules, which protect against the abuse of executive power.

MARK CAMMACK
Los Angeles, California

To the editors:

I take issue with Jeffrey Rosen's argument that the Lewinsky affair "had no possible relevance to the Jones suit." Everything that has come out in this entire sad episode has lent more, rather than less, credibility to Paula Jones's claim. If presented in a court of law, I doubt either the judge or jury would dismiss this information as unimportant.

JAMES RUHLAND
Mancos, Colorado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Market shake-up

To the editors:

I disagree with your editorial in favor of investing Social Security funds in the stock market ("Sound Investment," February 8). The potential for a higher rate of return is seductive, but it is less interesting to me given the very likely downside. Furthermore, if the U.S. government invests even four percent in private companies, it becomes a 500-pound-gorilla shareholder. It could easily distort the free-market dynamic by influencing company policy, protecting weakening companies, and the like.

In our present situation, the state already regulates a great deal of corporate and company-employee behavior. Today, by being neutral in the equation, the government can arbitrate labor disputes more or less impartially and can enforce employee protection legislation more or less impartially. Do we really want the U.S. government to become this heavily involved on the side of the employer? I think not.

GEORGE PETROV
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Total destruction

To the editors:

I differ with Istvan Deak on the difficulty of bombing Auschwitz ("Honor and Hindsight," February 15). A former director of the National Photographic Interpretation Center has publicly pointed out that the Eighth and Fifteenth Air Forces had high-resolution photos of Auschwitz at a time when bombers, having been unable to bomb their assigned targets, dumped their bomb loads in the Baltic. They did this *after* flying directly over Auschwitz. Had those bombs been dropped on Auschwitz, some who were killed would not have been. True, their situation would have been desperate. But how would you describe their situation at Auschwitz?

CHARLES KELBER
Rockville, Maryland

Istvan Deak replies:

It is difficult to debate a historical event whose main claim to fame is that it did not take place. Charles Kelber presents good arguments, but I am still convinced that neither the Fifteenth nor the Eighth Air Force (the latter stationed in Great Britain, even farther away than the Fifteenth in Italy) had an idea where precisely within Auschwitz the gas chambers were located. But let us say that the American commanders did, or could, or should have had this knowledge, at least after July 1944, when the report of two Slovak Jews who had escaped from Auschwitz reached the West: precision bombing of such a faraway target would still have been out of the question. The big bombers would have smashed the place and its surroundings, killing Jews, Polish civilians and Polish political prisoners, British, Soviet, and other POWs, German SS guards, German political prisoners and German criminals, Jehovah's Witnesses, gypsies, homosexuals, and other "asocials," without solving any problem. The Nazis had many ways to rid themselves of the remaining Jews. In fact, a million or more Jews died in German custody after the dismantling of Auschwitz, in October 1944, on death marches and in concentration camps located within the Reich. Auschwitz was a main killing field but by far not the only one within the Nazi system.

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FROM WASHINGTON

No limit

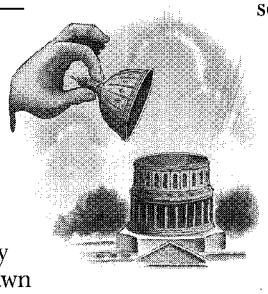
Can it be that Lamar Alexander has been running for president for only the past six years? It feels like forever. The preternaturally cheerful guy in the red plaid shirts began running for the 1996 Republican nomination back in December 1992; his 2000 bid picked up seamlessly where that failed effort left off. Alexander is an independently wealthy lawyer who served a couple of terms as governor of Tennessee and did a stint as George Bush's secretary of education. But, when the census-takers come next year to ask him his current occupation, the honest answer would be: professional presidential candidate.

Alexander's near-compulsive effort thus puts him in perpetual jeopardy of becoming a laughingstock—the Harold Stassen of our time, and all that. On the other hand, there is one sense in which he undeniably deserves to be taken seriously. All of that time he's spent running for the White House, futile or not, does make him an expert on the subject of running for president. And lately Alexander has been saying interesting, even courageous, things about the perverse effects of well-intentioned campaign finance rules on the election process.

In a political climate where his Republican rival, Arizona senator and Navy war hero John McCain, has become a media darling in part because of his call for tighter regulation of campaign spending, Alexander is the only candidate I'm aware of who's been willing to talk about the opposite proposition. He would eliminate the $1,000 limit on individual contributions, plus the other limits on raising and spending cash, in favor of a simpler regime that would rely on full disclosure to prevent either actual corruption or the appearance of it.

Under the current system, Alexander argues, candidates must spend so much time pursuing the fat cats who can afford $1,000 donations that there's no time left for talking to actual voters. (Maybe if Lamar himself had spent more time talking to such folks, he would have finally gotten the hint by now and dropped out of the race.) This, combined with the "front-loading" of the primary schedule, means that "the presidential nomination campaign starts before voters care and ends before they have a chance to vote," as Alexander put it in a thought-provoking 1996 article in the journal *Campaigns & Elections*.

Alexander also points out, as many other analysts do, that the rules have created a new category of candidate: the wealthy individual like Steve Forbes or Ross Perot, who can spend an unlimited amount of his own money on his own campaign. The apparent theory behind this loophole—which will also allow John Kerry to run a campaign financed by his wife Teresa's inherited gazillions, if he chooses to—is that you can't be corrupted by taking money from yourself or your spouse. But it's not clear why the line should be drawn there. Assume that life had worked out a little differently and Steve Forbes had decided that he wanted to spend $100 million of his own money to make Lamar Alexander president. As long as Alexander's dependence on such a sugar daddy were completely disclosed, what would be the problem? The voters could decide whether this was okay or whether they preferred another candidate who made a point of accepting only $100 donations. Why is it inherently more corrupting for a candidate to be beholden to one widely known rich individual, or a few such people, than to thousands of almost invisible rich individuals, as current law virtually requires?



As Alexander and others have pointed out, much of the frantic chase for campaign cash is caused by the simple economic reality that the $1,000 limit, set in 1974, has never been adjusted for inflation. According to a recent *National Journal* report, that means that the value of the maximum individual donation has actually declined to a mere $260 in constant dollars. No wonder candidates are trying harder and harder to get around the regulations by exploiting interest-group "issue advocacy" ads and "soft money."

This is a system, in short, that restricts political speech and forces otherwise decent people to appear to corrupt themselves. Alexander is correct that there are only two real alternatives: public financing of all elections, or the kind of liberalized regime he favors. He is also right when he says that a no-limits-plus-full-disclosure approach is preferable to public financing—largely because public financing would be difficult and costly to administer and would put the government in the business of making such inappropriate decisions as which primary candidates to fund. But, given political realities, the libertarian approach to the problem has almost zero chance of making it into law. Alexander may talk up his radical ideas now, but you can be sure that they will not be a major theme of his campaign once the race begins in earnest.

Perhaps the climate of opinion will change after the Supreme Court rules on a pending challenge to Missouri's $1,075 limit on contributions in state elections. The Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals has already held in that case that the state's contribution limits "have a severe impact on political dialogue" and are thus unconstitutional. The court, *National Journal* reports, took particular note of the erosion of the buying power of a $1,075 contribution due to inflation.

This suggests that, meanwhile, the most politically feasible reform would be to raise the individual donation limits sufficiently to reduce the amount of time candidates have to spend courting donors. Perhaps the limits could be raised to account for all the inflation that has occurred in the past 20 years, with a proviso that they will automatically be raised to keep pace with inflation each year thereafter. Indeed, there is already a bill pending in Congress, cosponsored by Republican Asa Hutchinson and Democrat Tom Allen, that would index the $1,000 contribution limit to inflation.

As the bipartisan support for this bill suggests, adjusting the limits for inflation is a manifestly reasonable idea that should appeal to both supporters and opponents of campaign finance regulation. Everyone agrees that it's bad to force candidates to spend so much of their time with potential contributors, and this change would go a long way toward alleviating that, without actually permitting any individual to buy any more influence, in real terms, than he could back in 1974. But, sooner or later, the country must face the tougher choices about how we organize and finance our political process. Let's just hope we get around to it sometime before the first Alexander administration.

CHARLES LANE

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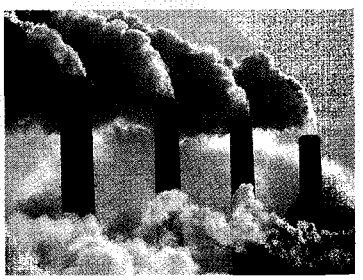

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

MARCH 15, 1999

TAX BITES

The share of America's gross domestic product that is taken up by federal taxes, 20.7 percent, is at a postwar high. You'd think that the time would be ripe for the Republican Party to lead yet another tax revolt, just as the party has been capitalizing on the anti-tax, anti-government sentiments of the middle class ever since voters adopted Proposition 13 in California two decades ago. Yet the public is not rallying to the latest GOP calls for more tax cuts. Instead, recent polls show that barely a tenth of the public thinks that a federal tax cut should be the government's top priority.

Overwhelmingly, voters prefer to dedicate the government's surpluses not to a rebate of their own hard-earned dollars but to salvaging Social Security and Medicare and paying down the national debt. As a result, the Republicans are now divided between those who believe that the party should stick to its old tax-cutting orthodoxy and those who think it should be more or less abandoned in favor of the "targeted" tax breaks that President Clinton has so skillfully marketed to the middle class.

What accounts for this apparent sea change in public attitudes? It's tempting to chalk it all up to the general bonhomie caused by the economic boom, now in its eighth consecutive year. With per capita incomes rising rapidly, the individual tax bite doesn't feel as sharp—especially if you're a middle-class mutual-fund-holder experiencing the "wealth effect" from a burgeoning portfolio.

Surely these factors play a part. But there's also considerable evidence that—thanks largely to various tax changes enacted by all of the last three presidents—the combined impact of payroll taxes and federal income taxes on most families is actually less than it was in the recent past, even though the share of GDP claimed by federal taxation has, indeed, grown.

According to the Treasury Department, a median-income family of four is now shouldering the lowest federal tax burden since 1976. And, according to a recent study by the accounting firm Deloitte & Touche for *The Washington Post*, a family with a total income of $85,000 is paying less now than it would have in 1979. It is thanks to increased tax receipts from the well-to-do, who benefit most from the growing economy—and from capital gains earned in a bull market—that the government has been able to reap ever-growing surpluses. So, when Republicans approach voters urging them to vent their anger at confiscatory taxation, there is, for most families, no anger left to vent.

Yet we attribute the increased public tolerance for federal taxes to intangible, political factors as well. Republican tax-cutting rhetoric worked because the public doubted the legitimacy of federal programs. As TNR alumni such as Mickey Kaus and Jacob Weisberg have pointed out, the excesses of welfare tainted all federal endeavors in the public mind. As long as middle-class voters had the impression that some of their tax dollars were going to undeserving folks who might not even be trying to get jobs, they became increasingly reluctant to send Washington tax dollars for *any* purpose. (Persistent budget deficits had the same effect; they reinforced the voters' view that paying taxes was tantamount to subsidizing federal fiscal incontinence.)

Just as its advocates (TNR included) predicted, welfare reform, which has helped reduce the caseload of Aid to Families with Dependent Children from 14.1 million six years ago to 8.4 million today, has also helped check the hemorrhaging of public confidence in national government.

It remains to be seen, however, whether this new mood of acceptance of the current level of governmental social spending will translate into support for *expansion* of activist government, as Kaus and many other welfare reform supporters contended. For now, what the voters seem most concerned with is the protection of the middle-class entitlement programs that benefit them most directly, Social Security and Medicare. (Indeed, as baby boomers age, they begin to think of themselves less and less as taxpayers and more and more as potential Medicare beneficiaries.) The most President Clinton seems to feel confident in proposing are bite-sized initiatives to put a few more teachers in the classroom, and the like. And, if that's the most that this compulsive consulter of polls and focus groups thinks will fly politically, you can be sure that it is, indeed, the maximum politically acceptable level of federal intervention. •

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NOTEBOOK

REPUBLICAN TOOL: It was the sociologist Daniel Bell who first identified "the cultural contradictions of capitalism," chief among which was the propensity of corporations to seek profits by stimulating illicit desires (through advertising, mainly) in such a way as to undermine solid bourgeois virtues. So long as he ran simply as an advocate of the flat tax, Steve Forbes escaped those contradictions—and fell flat himself among hard-core Republican conservatives. But, now that he's started courting the Christian right, the once and future candidate seems to be running afoul of Bell's contradictions himself. Case in point: The latest *Forbes* ad campaign, featuring a come-hither photograph of the sultry young cosmetics marketer Dineh Mohajer, whose "funky names" and "trendy nail tints" ("Jailbait" is just one example) have "caught the eye of Hollywood's glitterati and the fashion elite." All this, the capitalist tool declares, makes Mohajer one of *Forbes*'s (if not Forbes's) "kindred spirits"—a good reason, presumably, to subscribe. We didn't know good Republicans were supposed to concern themselves with things that catch the eye of Hollywood and the fashion elite. But, as the competition for Republican primary voters intensifies, it will be interesting to see whether any of Forbes's opponents makes an issue of his magazine's effort to sell itself by selling sex.

BOB DOLE, SWINGER: Appearing in his much-publicized television ad for Pfizer, Bob Dole concedes that erectile dysfunction is "a little embarrassing to talk about." But, Dole continues, "it's so important to millions of men and their partners." We're intrigued by Dole's use of the word "partners." Why not say "wives"? "Wives," of course, sounds old-fashioned—might limit the target audience a bit. But, by not using the term, Dole leaves open the possibility that he condones extramarital sex between men and women or, dare we say it, between men. Of course, Dole probably never wrote the text of the commercial; in all likelihood, the ad copy was just handed to him. Still, the fact that not even a septuagenarian product of the World War II generation—a man whose wife may be about to face the ultraconservative Republican primary electorate—thought to bridle at the script may be an indicator of just how permanent the sexual revolution has become.

GIVE ME TOURISM AND GIVE ME DEATH: Italy abandoned capital punishment in 1948; ever since then it has led Europe in an international fight against the practice, which TNR also opposes. When Virginia executed convicted murderer and rapist Joseph Roger O'Dell III in the summer of 1997 (despite appeals for clemency to Virginia's governor by Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi, Pope John Paul II, and prominent Italian politicians), women sobbed in the streets of Rome. Angry crowds massed outside the U.S. Embassy. The Sicilian city of Palermo paid for O'Dell's funeral and burial in its 600-year-old cemetery. His tombstone reads: "HONORARY CITIZEN OF PALERMO KILLED BY VIRGINIA, USA, IN A MERCILESS AND BRUTAL JUSTICE SYSTEM." When the Kurdish separatist guerrilla leader Abdullah Öcalan sought political asylum in Italy last November, current Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema, a member of Italy's reconstituted Communist Party, rebuffed Turkish attempts to extradite Öcalan on the grounds that he might be subject to death under Turkish law. Italy is now urging Turkey to "respect Öcalan's life," says D'Alema, "because Europe is against the death penalty." Yet the Italians have been conspicuously silent about the plight of Sergio Antonio Duarte and Carlos Rafael Pelaez. These are two Cubans recently sentenced to death at a closed-door trial in which the defendants enjoyed all the procedural rights that everyone on Fidel Castro's island is entitled to—that is, none. Their alleged crime? The robbery and murder of two Italian tourists last September. What's more, on February 16, Cuba dramatically expanded the range of crimes subject to the death penalty, including such nonlethal offenses as armed robbery and selling drugs to minors. Says Cuba's Attorney General Juan Escalona: "If we don't increase the repression against these [criminal] kinds of behavior, this could affect our tourism." And tourism is the lifeblood of Castro's decrepit economy. Alas, crime—especially the increasingly organized crime of prostitution—has gone hand in hand with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of dollar-carrying foreigners on the impoverished island. After the Canadians, the Italians are the second-most-numerous foreign investors and visitors to Cuba, and they have earned a reputation as especially aggressive consumers of the island's physical attractions. But, if the Italian government is concerned about the executions being carried out in the name of protecting its citizens' right to cavort safely in Cuba, it hasn't seen fit to say so. Nor has the pope, whose visit to Cuba in January 1998 was supposed to usher in a new dawn of freedom (but also included nary a word of protest about executions in Cuba, which have, of course, been used not only to punish common crimes but also to punish political ones). In the United States this January, by contrast, John Paul II lectured President Clinton about the evils of the death penalty and appealed to the governor of Missouri for clemency for a death-row inmate. How to account for this hypocrisy? D'Alema and his party have never quite gotten over the doctrinal belief that the enemy of America is their friend; D'Alema has been apologizing for Castro's regime in particular ever since he first traveled to the island as head of Italy's Communist Youth Federation in the 1970s. As for John Paul II, "The pope does not address every issue of capital punishment," Thomas E. Quigley, the U.S. Catholic Conference's Latin American-Caribbean policy adviser, explained to TNR. "The church believes that things should be done at the appropriate level." Apparently, when it comes to Cuba, the "appropriate level" is well below *sotto voce*. •

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Strong stuff

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WOBURN POSTCARD

CIVIL INACTION

By Dan Kennedy

If there was one emblematic scene from *A Civil Action*—the semipopular, second-rate movie based on the highly popular, first-rate book about pollution and illness in Woburn, Massachusetts—it was the closing sequence, which hammers home the one-man-up-against-the-system theme. In the scene, John Travolta, playing Jan Schlichtmann, the brash young lawyer who sued two companies that may have contaminated the city's drinking water, writes a letter to the Environmental Protection Agency. The letter details what Schlichtmann discovered in the course of pursuing his unsuccessful lawsuit and urges the agency to pick up where he left off. Cut to trucks delivering boxes of evidence to an EPA warehouse. As the movie fades, a screen of text tells us that Schlichtmann's efforts prompted the EPA to order a $69 million cleanup, with a good chunk of the bill to be paid by W.R. Grace & Company and Beatrice Foods Company—the very corporations that had bested Schlichtmann in the courtroom.

It makes for an uplifting conclusion to a decidedly downbeat story. It is also completely and utterly false. But, unlike most of the fictionalizations, exaggerations, and dramatizations in the transition from Jonathan Harr's best-seller to the Hollywood screen, the tale of Schlichtmann and the EPA is likely to have a lasting—and distorting—effect on the moviegoers who saw the film over the past few months. The notion that it took one lone ranger to force an uncaring, unresponsive government bureaucracy to act may resonate. But it's not true—or, at least, it wasn't in Woburn. The EPA was on the scene for several years before Schlichtmann had even heard of Woburn. The three companies Schlichtmann sued—Grace, Beatrice, and UniFirst Corporation, an industrial dry-cleaning company that settled for about $1 million before the 1986 trial—had already been identified by the EPA as possible sources of contamination to the East Woburn groundwater aquifer that fed the two polluted wells. EPA officials complained that Schlichtmann's suit actually delayed the cleanup, since they believed Grace and Beatrice were loath to cooperate with efforts that could somehow benefit Schlichtmann.

But, if Woburn is not a story of government indifference as portrayed by the film version of *A Civil Action*, neither is it a story of a decisive government forcing polluters to answer for their misdeeds. What really happened is quite a bit more complicated than either of those propositions suggests. It also raises serious questions about government's ability to protect the health and safety of its citizens even today, when knowledge of toxic waste's dangers is widespread—questions very different from those the moviegoers were asking one another as they drove home from their local multiplexes in the past few months.

The events that culminated in *A Civil Action* trace back to 1972, when doctors diagnosed Jimmy Anderson, the three-and-a-half-year-old son of Anne and Charles Anderson, with leukemia. The Andersons lived in Woburn, a working-class Boston suburb home to some 35,000 residents and a handful of industries that spewed toxic waste.

Long before Jimmy died in 1981, Anne Anderson had begun to suspect that the foul-smelling, foul-tasting water that corroded her pipes had also caused Jimmy's illness. Her suspicions deepened as she met other Woburn families while bringing her son to Boston for treatment. Eventually, investigators reported that the 28 childhood leukemia cases diagnosed in Woburn between 1964 and 1986 were four times greater than should have been expected for a community of its size. Anderson kept her concerns mainly to herself until May 1979, when discarded barrels of chemicals were discovered near the Aberjona River, upstream from the wells. State investigators tested the wells and found no evidence that the contents of the barrels had made their way into them. What they did find, though, was even worse: drinking water contaminated with trichloroethylene, tetrachloroethylene, and other industrial solvents.

In retrospect, the party most responsible for the cancer epidemic these chemicals may have produced was the city itself. Given that a toxic brew of chemicals had been floating through Woburn's Aberjona River valley for more than 150 years, it's mind-boggling that officials even considered pumping such water into people's homes. Yet they did. And, even though the consultant they hired in 1958 recommended against tapping such groundwater given its likely toxicity, they went ahead and sank two wells by the river—one in 1964 and one in 1967. (In fairness, the instruments of that day were too crude to detect the chemicals that were at issue in the trial.) When the 1979 test results came back—proving those suspicions correct—the state did the only thing it could at the time: it shut down the wells, permanently. And, after two decades of legislative initiatives, epidemiological studies, groundwater modeling, and cleanup efforts, that simple act of turning off the faucet stands as the only truly effective action government officials have ever taken.

Of course, that story isn't the focus of *A Civil Action*, as presented on screen. The film instead centers on the lawsuit that grew out of the Woburn families' perfectly justifiable desire to hold the corporations that they be-

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lieved had actually polluted their water accountable—to force them to apologize and to make them pay. Yet the movie's retelling of this episode, and its relatively flattering portrayal of Schlichtmann, serve primarily to muddle the true message of the case.

To be sure, the odds were against Schlichtmann, who was up against the limits of science and was overmatched by Beatrice's and Grace's high-paid corporate lawyers. Yet he all but ensured his own defeat by walking away from a possible $8 million pretrial settlement with Beatrice and by allowing his poorly prepared star witness, Princeton University hydrogeologist George Pinder, to present an inaccurate theory of how groundwater moves in the Aberjona River valley. After a 78-day trial, the jury cleared Beatrice. And, though the jurors found Grace had negligently contaminated the wells, U.S. District Court Judge Walter Jay Skinner threw out the verdict and ordered a retrial because they supplied contradictory answers to Skinner's overly complex written instructions. Grace settled for $8 million, with each of the eight families Schlichtmann represented getting about $400,000. Not only was no apology forthcoming, but Grace continues to insist that chemicals dumped on its property never flowed into the wells.

Those setbacks notwithstanding, there's no question that much has been learned as a result of Woburn. Schlichtmann himself personifies many of those lessons: these days, he talks about solving such cases through cooperation and mediation rather than courtroom confrontation, an approach he's now pursuing in a toxic-waste case strikingly similar to Woburn's, in Toms River, New Jersey. Yet the primary lesson of the Woburn story is, or should have been, for government to take responsible steps to protect the public in the first place. And, ironically enough, this lesson has been learned only imperfectly. The cleanup project that Grace, Beatrice, UniFirst, and two other property owners are paying for is, in some respects, a testimony to government impotence: it will take decades before the groundwater is clean enough to drink, and in any case a succession of newly enlightened city officials has pledged that the aquifer will never again be tapped. Meanwhile, in North Woburn, federal, state, and city officials are making plans to pave over yet another toxic-waste site, known as the Industri-Plex, and convert it into a Target department store and a train station, even though contaminated groundwater continues to flow off the site—in effect, covering up the toxic waste, keeping an eye on it, and hoping for the best. The city's current mayor, Robert Dever, a retired airline pilot, says only that the groundwater problem will be addressed as part of the development plans. That's not exactly a happy ending. But, then, when was real life ever like the movies?

DAN KENNEDY covered the Woburn toxic-waste trial and its aftermath for the *Daily Times Chronicle* of Woburn. He has also written about the case for *The Boston Phoenix*, where he is the media critic.

The networks move on.

MUST SEE TV?

By Steven R. Weisman and Hendrik Hertzberg

Some viewing highlights from the post-Monica world:

9 p.m. (FOX) **Charlierose Place**. Bruce (Lindsey Graham) puts the moves on Amanda (Laura Ingraham) after catching Brent (Lanny Davis) and Sydney (Ann Coulter) behind the bougainvillea.

9 p.m. (ABC) **Cokie the Vampire Slayer**. After Bill slips the noose, Cokie drives a stake through Sam's heart.

9 p.m. (NBC) **Ex-Friends**. Complications ensue when Chandler (Christopher Hitchens) and Rachel (Linda Tripp) arrange a surprise lunch for Ross (Sidney Blumenthal) and Monica (Monica Lewinsky). Rachel's dad: Norman Podhoretz.

10 a.m. (PBS) **Barney**. The loveable dinosaur is surprised to find his apartment being used as a male brothel.

10 a.m. (CBN) **The 666 Club**. Who gets to wear the sign of the beast? Contestants: Rahm Emanuel, Richard Ben-Veniste, Alan Dershowitz. Guest host: Jerry Falwell.

10 p.m. (CNBC) **Oddball with Chris Matthews**. Guests: Dennis Rodman, Marilyn Manson.

7 p.m. (CARTOON NETWORK) **The Flyntstones**. Wilma (Helen Chenoweth) teases Fred (Bob Livingston) about a youthful indiscretion.

7 p.m. (UPN) **Starr Trek**. Susan McDougal's third cousin's childhood friend is hunted down and deposed by aliens. (Repeat)

8 p.m. (UPN) **Clueless**. Cher (Mary Bono) yields back the balance of her time.

8 p.m. (WB) **Hillary**. A young woman, left alone when her boyfriend jilts her, moves to New York to pursue her dreams. (Premiere)

8:30 p.m. (FOX) **Divorced . . . With Children**. Joe Lieberman, Newt Gingrich, and George Will discuss family values.

8:30 p.m. (UPN) **The Jeffersons**. When Tom and Bill can't decide who's the bigger scamp, Sally proposes a DNA test.

8:30 p.m. (ABC) **America's Phoniest Home Videos!** Trent Lott, Robert Byrd, and William Rehnquist congratulate themselves on how well the system works.

STEVEN R. WEISMAN writes editorials for *The New York Times*. HENDRIK HERTZBERG is a senior editor of *The New Yorker*.

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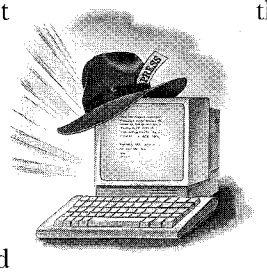
ANKARA DISPATCH

KURDLED

By Thomas Goltz

I paid a visit to the Military Martyrs' Cemetery in Ankara the day after Turkish commandos captured Abdullah Öcalan, notorious terrorist and leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and flew him from Nairobi to a remote island prison back in Turkey. The Martyrs' Cemetery is the final resting place of some 200 of the 4,000 soldiers who have died since the PKK launched its war against the Turkish state in 1984. Among those visiting family members' graves that day, I found many willing to denounce the "baby-killer" Öcalan and to urge the state to execute him—even to let the people themselves "rip him apart with our fingers," as one woman put it. But what might surprise those who have been watching American and European television coverage of Öcalan's capture is that many people rejoicing at the prospect of an end to Öcalan's purported battle for Kurdish national liberation were Kurds themselves.

"I am a Kurd—and my son lies buried right here, next to his!" Hamit Kose told me. His son, Ercument, who died at age 24, was in the Turkish Army's special forces and fought for three years against the PKK, sometimes deep inside northern Iraq. "And I am a Kurd—and here lies my son! My only one!" wailed another man. "Please, please!" pleaded another grieving father. "Tell the world that we are brothers! Turk, Kurd, Laz, Circassian—all of us who live here! The PKK must not be allowed to get away with its cheap propaganda and filthy lies!"



Plainly, there's more to the story of Turkey's war with the PKK than you would guess from watching the dramatic televised scenes of protesting Öcalan supporters rampaging through the capitals of Europe. Though the protests in Europe were portrayed as a reliable indicator of Kurdish sentiment about their "leader," the silent majority of Kurds living in Turkey opposes the PKK and reviles Öcalan. Many Kurds have been murdered by his forces or have died fighting them. The supposedly rigid line between the repressive Turkish state and the restive Kurdish minority is actually a blurry one. The causes of the war in that country do, indeed, include the excessive response of the Turkish state to legitimate expressions of Kurdish identity. But the PKK's crackpot ideology (and foreign support of the PKK by such traditional Turkish enemies as Syria and Greece) played a role, too. Indeed, genuine hatred between Turks and Kurds was probably the smallest factor sustaining the fighting. And no figure in the story illustrates these complexities better than Abdullah Öcalan himself.

Öcalan—his family name suggests an Armenian forefather who converted to Islam—was born to a poor family in a poor village in the desperately poor Turkish southeast around 1949. His mother, it seems, was Turkish. After attending primary and then secondary school in the region of Urfa on the Euphrates River, Öcalan attended a public university in Ankara in the late '60s and early '70s, focusing on political science.

Like university campuses elsewhere at the time, those in Turkey were hotbeds of anti-Americanism and exotic brands of Marxism. Internally, it was a period of extremes, too: the country had undergone the trauma of a Kemalist military coup in 1960 and then a second military "coup by decree" in 1971, both resulting in the jailing of thousands of political activists on both the left and right. (These coups were to be followed by a third, that of September 12, 1980.)

What this meant for a young half-Turk/half-Kurd was a total immersion in the sort of politics-as-blood-sport characteristic of societies in transition. "In many ways, it was probably a toss-up for Öcalan whether he should embrace theoretical Marxism or extreme Turkish nationalism," a longtime observer of Turkish politics told me. "Not only are many of the leading figures of leftist parties in Turkey of some sort of Kurdish heritage, but so are many of the leading figures in such right-wing organizations as the Grey Wolves."

Many of Öcalan's contemporaries from the '70s eventually graduated from their marginal political parties or splinter groups to become leaders of banking, business, and industry in the "economic miracle" created in the mid-'80s by the late Turkish president, Turgut Özal (who was himself half-Kurdish).

Öcalan, however, continued down the road to revolution. In 1973, meeting secretly outside Ankara, Öcalan and a number of other "southeasterns" formed the Democratic Association of Patriotic Higher Educationalists. The title did not stick, and the group, active in spreading Marxist propaganda in traditionally Kurdistan areas of the Turkish southeast, changed its name to the Revolutionaries of Kurdistan and then to the National Salvation Army, or UKO—an organization committed to effecting revolution throughout all of Turkey but via the soft underbelly of the disenfranchised, rural Kurds. Soon, the organization changed its name again—to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which soon became known by its Kurdish acronym, PKK.

In 1979, Öcalan and other members of the PKK Central Committee changed their base of operations to Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, joining a variety of other terrorist groups seeking to exploit the collapse of central authority in Beirut. The timing could not have been better, for, in leaving Turkey, Öcalan managed to avoid getting caught in the massive wave of arrests following the 1980 military coup. Several other PKK figures were not

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so lucky and ended up dead in the notorious prison in the city of Diyarbakir.

The period of direct military rule in Turkey lasted from the 1980 coup through the election of Turgut Özal as prime minister in 1983. But its spirit endured beyond that thanks to the new, fascist-Italy-inspired constitution the generals had pushed through in 1982. What this translated into for Turkey's Kurds was a cultural crackdown of proportions unseen since the founding of the republic by Ataturk in 1923. Kurds may have been a marginalized part of the society before, but now Kurdishness itself was criminalized. A bizarre series of new laws banned efforts to "divide the nation" and the use of any tongue that was not the official language of a country with which Turkey has diplomatic relations. Turkish officialdom began to refer to Kurds as "southeasterns" or even "Mountain Turks."

This not only made Turkey look utterly foolish in the eyes of the world but also supplied the PKK with the rallying cry it had previously lacked. With every arrested Kurdish member of parliament who dared address the issue publicly, and with every pacification campaign conducted by the military, the resonance of the PKK increased. A once-marginal Marxist organization soon found itself the only banner in the largely Kurdish southeast to which Kurds might rally—because the authorities in Ankara had banned or repressed all others.

The first assault by the PKK on the state came in August 1984, with twin attacks on two small garrisons near the borders with Iran and Iraq. One soldier and three civilians died. Other hit-and-run attacks followed, as well as the murder of such symbols of the Turkish state as schoolteachers, doctors, and road-repair teams. The Turkish Army responded by mounting two cross-border attacks into northern Iraq, announcing after each one that the military had crushed "terrorist Abdullah Öcalan's PKK" for all time. Öcalan's response was to form the "military wing" of the PKK in 1986, known by the acronym of ARGK. The Turkish governmental response was to arm loyalist Kurds as "village guards." The PKK-ARGK response was to slaughter the families of these guards.

By the mid-'90s, the annual Turkish military forays into northern Iraq had become sarcastically known among diplomats and local intellectuals as the "spring offensive." The mounting Vietnam-style body count, meanwhile, seemed to have a reverse effect on PKK strength: each killed PKK member brought in ten more recruits.

And the new recruits were not drawn exclusively from the original PKK target group of *Lumpenproletariat* (or their sons) living in the standard apartment ghettos on the fringes of Turkey's industrial cities. Increasingly, volunteers came from émigré families in Germany and the rest of Europe and even Armenia and Australia. Many female recruits were specially trained as suicide bombers for use in crowded urban environments like Istanbul's bazaar and even on the beaches favored by European tourists along the Turkish Riviera.

As the death toll spiraled upward, the "Kurdish issue" in Turkey became the third rail of politics. In addition to becoming the target of an international human rights campaign for tolerating the abuse and torture of suspected PKK sympathizers in prison, Ankara was obliged to watch the once-celebrated economic "miracle" performed by Turgut Özal devolve into massive debt. Defense expenditures shot through the roof—by some estimates, totaling five percent of the annual GNP.

As a direct result of the ongoing conflict, however, official Turkey has been forced to accept what is now referred to as "the Kurdish reality." Starting with the "shocking" statement of Turgut Özal during a 1988 election campaign stop in Diyarbakir that "in Turkey there is no difference between Turk and Kurd," the state has moved (albeit at glacial speed) to relax the ban on Kurdishness. Kurdish-language cassette tapes are no longer seized; films about Kurdish life in Turkey, such as the 1982 Cannes Film Festival winner *Yol* (*Road*), began appearing in Turkish cinemas. High-level politicians ranging from Turgut Özal to the speaker of parliament, Hikmet Cetin, began to refer to themselves as "of-Turkey Kurds." In the wake of Öcalan's arrest, academics and pundits have actively tried to embrace Kurdishness as an intrinsic part of the Turkish body politic.

It may be too little and too late. For, in the interim 15 years of blood and trauma, Öcalan managed to make himself the head of an army of 10,000 to 20,000, with cells spread across Europe, the Middle East, North America, and even such countries as Armenia and Kazakhstan. He also became the boss figure of a financial empire based on drug trafficking and protection rackets in Kurdish communities abroad—and the continued beneficiary of post-Soviet Russian, Syrian, and Greek aid designed to keep rival Turkey destabilized.

As a five-way power struggle for the leadership of the PKK gets under way in the mountains (or, more specifically, in PKK safe houses in Europe), Öcalan will not be saved from the hangman's noose by the clemency the Turkish government now wisely extends to the PKK rank and file. Rather, his last hope may be the recognition by the state that it is more expedient to let Öcalan grow old and foolish on his prison island rather than to create a martyr for a cause that is in all probability now lost.

Perhaps sensing this, Öcalan himself seems to be emphasizing his own ambiguous ethnic roots. Turkish TV has been broadcasting a videotape of Öcalan in handcuffs on the private jet that whisked him back to Turkey.

"Welcome back home," one of the masked commandos tells him.

"Thanks," says a dazed Öcalan. "You know I love Turkey. My mother was a Turk."

"We are recording this, you know," says another of the masked men.

"Record away," says Öcalan. "It will be a pleasure to be of service to Turkey."

THOMAS GOLTZ has covered Turkey for numerous U.S. newspapers and magazines for the past 15 years and is the author of *Azerbaijan Diary* (M.E. Sharpe, 1998).

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Why Gary Bauer thinks he can win.

THE MAKING OF A CRUSADER

By Michelle Cottle

NEWPORT, KENTUCKY

"The card games went on back in that area," says Larry Trapp, as he begins our mini-tour of the musty, low-ceiling basement beneath his antique shop. "There was a small bar in this corner, and they sold betting tickets for the horse races out of those two holes in that wall there."

Trapp motions toward a small door in the far wall, beside which stand the pale naked legs and torso of a department store mannequin. "The prostitution was in there, but that didn't come until much later." Then, turning a final corner, he stops in the center of a large room heaped high with gambling paraphernalia: gaming chips, dice, playing cards, bingo cards—all emblazoned with the insignias of the casinos that once operated in the area. The piles include ashtrays, silverware, swizzle sticks, compacts, cigarette lighters, playbills, and dinner menus from the old casinos—one big kitschy monument to an age when sleepy little Newport was one of the hottest illegal gambling spots in the nation.

Nowadays, you won't find much organized vice in Newport. Reform-minded residents purged the town nearly 40 years ago, turning it into just another quaint, slightly shabby suburb of Cincinnati, which sits right across the Ohio River. But the story of Newport's debauched past—and of how it eventually righted itself—is of more than purely local interest. Among the ranks of the area's reformers was an earnest young foot soldier named Gary Bauer. Today, Bauer is running for president as the standard-bearer of the Christian right; his is nothing less than a bid to correct America's "virtue deficit." And the roots of Bauer's campaign lie in what was, in its time, an equally improbable crusade to clean up his hometown.

From the late '30s to the early '60s, Newport was run by an organized crime syndicate based in Cleveland. With a population of only 30,000, the town catered to thousands of tourists, conventioneers, mobsters, and celebrities each year. There was a bar on every corner, gambling in every bar, casinos to rival the joints in Vegas, and bordellos that serviced high-rollers and pigeons alike. The glitzier casinos—advertised as "dinner clubs"—featured Cab Calloway, Jimmy Durante, and Sophie Tucker. Frank and Dean were known to drop by. Even Marilyn Monroe is rumored to have crooned a few songs while draped across one of the club's pianos.

In addition to the "legitimate" casinos, some of the seedier bars earned a reputation as "bustout joints," because the owners saw to it that no customer left until he was flat busted—even if that meant drugging someone into unconsciousness and then emptying his pockets. Brothel owners wired prostitutes' rooms so they could later blackmail the johns, and fatal shoot-outs were not uncommon. Conveniently, though, the syndicate also controlled most of the local police, courts, and politicians, so lawbreakers rarely went to jail.

Away from the lights and music of the casinos, mid-century Newport was a depressing, depressed little town. The major employers were the local brewery and steel mills, plus a handful of manufacturing plants in Cincinnati. Waves of poor families migrated to the area from nearby Appalachia in search of work, further flooding the market with cheap labor. Widespread poverty and a low premium on education resulted in astronomical drop-out rates at the local high schools. During Bauer's childhood, it was not unusual to see a freshman class of 400 or so students shrink to fewer than 200 by graduation.

Like many of the area's breadwinners, Bauer's father, Stanley ("Spike" to his friends), bounced from one low-paying job to the next: steel worker, truck driver, maintenance man. Both he and Bauer's mom, Betty, came from Newport's west end—the shadier, seedier half even today. Early on, the couple pinched pennies to buy a home in the more respectable east end. "We're talking about a difference of fifteen blocks here," says Bauer with a small smile, but adds that those 15 blocks meant the difference between "one side of the railroad tracks or the other."

But, even on the right side of the tracks, alcoholism, spousal abuse, and petty crime were rampant—social maladies made worse by the omnipresent gambling and prostitution. More than one paycheck was lost at the craps table on the men's way home from the factories each Friday, and more than one wife bore the brunt of her man's frustration. Bauer's own father was an alcoholic whose all-night binges prompted the occasional screaming match with Gary's mom.

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As these stories so often go, Bauer's parents encouraged him to read and work toward a better life; as his awareness grew, the surrounding corruption rankled more. "I developed an early interest in the relationship between virtue and having liberty," says Bauer. "It seemed to me that what was happening in this town was the wrong type of liberty. People were doing whatever they wanted if it felt good, and they thought they could get a quick buck. And you could see the obvious downsides in all that in the broken families, in spousal abuse, in violence in the schools—all those things that I think we've learned in the years since can affect a republic if you begin to overthrow virtue."

Bauer's assessment of Newport's moral quagmire was not, however, widely shared among the townsfolk—at least not publicly. By popular recollection, those who had grown up with the casinos simply viewed slot machines in the corner drug store as "the way things were." Other folks made their living dealing cards or turning tricks, or else indirectly relied on the millions of dollars dropped each year by out-of-town pleasure seekers. Thus, local politics were dominated by the pro-vice constituency, known in Newport parlance as the "liberals."

GARY BAUER BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

But the town's "wide open" atmosphere eventually drew national scrutiny, beginning with a 1957 article in *Esquire* that took readers on a guided tour of the area's darker delights. Other publications followed suit, and Newport soon acquired the moniker of "Sin City"—to the embarrassment of some citizens. "When we went on vacation," recalls Michael Ryan, a childhood friend of Bauer's, "my mother would never write down in the motel log book 'Newport, Kentucky.' She always put 'Cincinnati, Ohio.'"

Disgusted by local officials' disingenuous denials of the *Esquire* story, Newport postal worker Christian Seifried approached the town's Ministerial Association about forming a Social Action Committee to push for reform. Composed of ministers and laymen from area churches, the SAC dispatched two-man teams to collect information on the town's casinos, bustout joints, and bordellos. Seifried amassed the reports for use in court proceedings. Four long, frustrating years later, the SAC had picked up enough support to organize a political movement, dubbed the Committee of 500. The Committee promptly formed a third party and drew up a slate of like-minded candidates to run on the Switch to Honesty ticket in 1961.

Bauer joined the push. A mere sophomore in high school, he stuffed envelopes, handed out leaflets, and went door-to-door asking for votes. The experience taught him a key life lesson: standing up for what's right can be extremely unpopular—at least initially. "You were just as likely to have a guy come to the door who was trying to become part of the middle class and whose job was dealing cards," he recalls. "Or maybe you came to a door and the woman in the house was a showgirl on Monmouth Street, and her attitude would be, 'Get the hell out of here. What are you trying to do, take my job away?'"

In the beginning, Bauer couldn't even enlist his own father's support. "My father was initially mortified that I was hooking up with this reform group, because this was directly counter to the guys he would be drinking with who would sometimes be working in these establishments," says Bauer. "They would say, 'Spike, what's wrong with your son? He's passing these leaflets out. Get control of the kid for crying out loud.'" But Bauer pressed on, eventually convincing his dad to post a pro-reform sign in the yard. When some liberals reacted by slashing the tires on the family car, Spike Bauer came on board for good. "He then became angry that, just because I was working for this reform group, this would cause anything to be done to our home," says Bauer.

In the end, the syndicate was done in by its own overreaching. George Ratterman, a former quarterback for the Cleveland Browns, was the Switch to Honesty candidate for county sheriff. Six months out from the elec-

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tion, as Ratterman's candidacy began to seem viable, a local casino owner tried to provide the liberals with a little extra insurance: he slipped Ratterman a Mickey and maneuvered him into bed with a stripper named—yes—April Flowers. The casino owner then called his pals at the police station and arranged for Ratterman to be arrested. "The doctor said I had been given enough chloral hydrate to kill a normal person," says Ratterman, who has lived to laugh about the experience.

Within 24 hours, Newport was abuzz with the news that Ratterman had been framed. His lawyer held a press conference to announce the doctor's finding of chloral hydrate. The national press flocked to Kentucky for the trial, and the publicity helped prompt not only a grand jury probe into the frame-up but also long-delayed hearings to oust local officials charged with failing to uphold the law. FBI agents were soon on hand, investigating the incident as part of Attorney General Robert Kennedy's war on organized crime. Come November, Ratterman won in a landslide.

Almost overnight, the syndicate's leading figures began heading for more congenial climes such as Las Vegas. In his 1961 year-end report to the president, Bobby Kennedy boasted that "[w]agering has virtually ceased in a major gambling center, Newport, Kentucky."

In Newport's reform, young Gary saw the universal struggle between good and evil played out among his friends and neighbors (a struggle, incidentally, in which the forces of venality literally marched under the banner of "liberalism"). The experience shaped his perceptions of the relationship between personal and public corruption, of the power of morally determined average citizens to triumph even when popular opinion starts out against them—and of the price one must occasionally be willing to pay for one's beliefs. Today he is not shy about invoking that experience and its relevance to contemporary political debate. "I've always been curious about people who say today that values have no place in politics," says Bauer. Whether you're talking about the civil rights movement or the reform of Newport, he notes, "I just think that all the great debates in American politics end up being essentially moral debates."

In a February appearance on ABC's "World News Tonight," Bauer stressed that his ultimate goal is "a society that's stable, where marriage means something, where the virtue deficit is being dealt with, where kids are being taught reliable standards of right and wrong." As envisioned by Bauer, such a society would have no place for abortion, homosexuality, or any of the other liberal-approved vices that, in his view, make America today morally analogous to Newport circa 1960. Of course, many people would question whether the country, for all its licentiousness, is indeed comparable to the Babylon on the Ohio where Bauer cut his teeth as a political activist. But that doesn't seem to trouble Bauer. After all, if he could enlist his own fallen father in the crusade to clean up Sin City, he figures he can win over his wayward countrymen, too. •

The case for sprawl.

SUBURBAN MYTH

By Gregg Easterbrook

The ideal restaurant would have terrific food, moderate prices, and would be unpopular, so lines would never inconvenience diners. Legislatures could make restaurants less crowded by, say, mandating that some tables be kept vacant even when customers are queued. Those already seated would surely benefit. But others would stew over being denied service, while business and jobs would be lost.

It's worth remembering this as politicians begin to tackle the issue of suburban "sprawl," currently emerging as a primary topic in the run-up to Campaign 2000. Polling data and focus groups show that sprawl has hot political Q-scores; last fall, state and local voters approved nearly 200 ballot measures to limit development or preserve green space. Vice President Gore has unveiled a "livability agenda" to ease traffic and other frustrations of suburban commuters. As Gore notes, "Parents want to spend more time with their kids and less time stuck behind a steering wheel." And Gore is hardly alone. New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman, a Republican, is leading the charge for a $1 billion program to set aside half the state's remaining wildland. Even Ralph Reed is touting sprawl politics.

Of course, everybody wishes there were fewer cars on the road, fewer strip malls, and less demand for living space or commercial square footage. But how do you discourage such things without denying a place at the table to those who have not yet been seated—especially

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in a country whose population is growing? If suburbs are where Americans choose to live—and that verdict is in, the suburban class now constituting the majority of Americans—then brainpower should be applied to making burbs as livable as possible. It's a good sign that policy organizations such as the Brookings Institution are turning their attention to such tasks as planning for "smart growth."

But, as an issue, sprawl can also sound awfully similar to exclusionary zoning and other pull-up-the-ladder ideas that comfortable communities have used in the past to keep out unwanted arrivistes—often minorities and immigrants. One person's greenspace preservation is another's denied housing permit. So here are a few qualms about the emerging national buzz on sprawl:

Sprawl is infuriating but not statistically significant. The footprint of the United States reflects an ever-bigger shoe size; the Chicago metropolitan area, for example, grew 46 percent from 1970 to 1990. The Sierra Club estimates that 400,000 acres per year are being converted to developed use. Yet are these figures really as worrisome as they seem? Four hundred thousand acres, for example, sounds like the circumference of the Crab Nebula but represents 0.02 percent of the U.S. land mass: 50 years of sprawl at the current rate would be required to consume a single percent of America's expanse.

Just 3.4 percent of the United States is urban, suburban, or otherwise "built up," according to federal figures. If roads are added to the calculation, the total concrete-ized area of the country rises to 4.8 percent. The forested portion of the United States is, by contrast, 20.4 percent, meaning there are four acres of woodland for every acre of development. Even if the definition of "developed" is expanded in the most liberal way, to include all land used for crops or grazing, the United States is still two-thirds wild, one-third under the hand of man. Sprawl is a local problem, not an all-encompassing effect.

Recent concerns about agricultural land-use patterns, often spun in the media and by lobbyists as a crisis of "vanishing farms," also diminish on close examination. "Land in farms" fell 16 percent between 1964 and 1997, according to the Agriculture Department. But this much-cited category incorporates considerable acreage that owners were calling farms only for tax purposes. Since the 1960s, "total cropland" is down only about one percent, while "harvested cropland," or land under cultivation, is up eight percent. And production per acre—what matters most—is way, way up, thanks to high-yield crop strains.

Moreover, the trend line is toward the *decline* of sprawl, relative to people at least. David Rusk, a theorist of the smart-growth movement, estimates that U.S. metro development covered 208,000 square miles in 1950 and by 1990 had sprawled out to 345,000 square miles. But, through that period, the population of those areas rose from 84 million to 159 million. This translates to a 66 percent increase in physical area for a population increase of 89 percent. America isn't gobbling up more space per capita; it's gobbling less—mainly because developers are responding to market incentives to use land more efficiently. Sprawl theory assumes that builders despoil the land without restraint. Yet price is already an important restraint; land is an expensive resource.

People fled city centers because they wanted to. One motivator for suburban expansion was white desire to escape contact with blacks. As *Brookings Review* recently noted, "Race has been a major factor in the spatial configuration of our metropolitan areas." That aspect of sprawl does not reflect well on American society, but the rest of the phenomenon is mainly a voluntary choice. Blacks are now sprawling, too: mainly African American, middle-class burbs are expanding in Georgia, Maryland, and elsewhere. Detached homes, verdant lawns, lower crime rates—for many millions of Americans, including many millions of minority Americans, such things represent a lifelong dream. People of all races seek the sprawled areas because that's what they *like.*

People also sought the suburbs to escape the corruption and mismanagement of urban government—especially the disastrous inner-city school systems. Suburban government is usually clean and responsive, if ho-hum; if people like honest government supervising their driveways and lawns, why should public policy argue with that judgment? Intellectuals have long disdained the expansion of the burbs, despite works such as *The Levittowners* that demonstrate little urban-suburban distinction in sophistication. Of course, many suburbanites have trite values and nothing to say, but then the same goes for many who reside in Upper West Side walk-ups and hold subscription seats for the opera. And, for reasons never entirely clear, twentieth-century liberalism swooned for Le Corbusier's contention that human beings deserve to be packed into high-density tower housing that rises from the landscape like so many vertical penitentiaries. Maybe there was once a reason to believe that such structures were the only way to bring decent living standards to the masses, but now it's clearly possible to bring detached homes to the masses. That's an important social achievement, not a cause for angst.

We know from the choices of housing buyers, and from the unhappiness of housing-project residents, that most Americans despise living in cramped quarters. Despite this, some sprawl theorists assert that, since the average density of an American metro area is one-fourth the density of metro areas in nations such as Germany, public policy should strive to force a dramatic compression of American living space. But if Germany, or any of many other European or Asian countries, had more land area, its citizens would clamor for detached homes and lawns, too. The fact that other nations lack the expanse in which to offer the majority of their citizens homeownership hardly means that America, blessed with such space, should prevent citizens from occupying it.

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Sprawl has economic utility. Some cities have spread out in a jumbled, ill-thought-through manner that causes awful traffic bottlenecks, wasted fuel, and an excessively asphaltized ambiance. But it is not the case that tract housing, overpasses, multilane roads, malls, and other aspects of suburbia happen solely because of rapacious developers or civic pandemonium. Most happen because they are economically efficient.

Subdivision development is nowhere near as tasteful as an elm-shaded, turn-of-the-century Cape Cod in the university district, but it has the virtue of being affordable to many more families. Malls may be stupefying, but they are a furiously efficient means of retailing. Two-car, two-earner families with husband and wife commuting in opposite directions may lead to daily stress but might also be one reason for the American economy's flexibility. The United States has experienced unprecedented economic growth, low unemployment, and improvement in living standards during the very period of burb explosion and traffic jams. Maybe these factors are positively correlated, not negatively.

Consider the assumption that road construction is odious. Roads are not only much cheaper to build than mass transit systems; they are also more flexible. The excellent subway system in Washington, D.C., which I ride to work, is fixed in its downtown-outward configuration: tens of billions of dollars would be required to rebuild the system to reflect the between-burb commuting that has been the main urban transportation trend of the past 20 years. Roads, on the other hand, can reflect changes in commuter patterns instantly—people just point their cars at different destinations.

Cars, in turn, are consumers of money and fossil fuel, and we belittle ourselves when we regard them as status symbols. But automobiles also promote economic efficiency and personal freedom; there are good reasons why even anti-sprawlers want to own one. As new cars approach negligible levels of pollution emissions, environmental objections to them decline. And an annoying little secret of suburban life is that, even with traffic congestion, it's almost always faster to get somewhere in a car than by riding public transit. Cars are ubiquitous partly because people make rational time-money tradeoffs regarding their use, and those sorts of judgments, though sometimes wrong on the micro scale, are usually logical on the macro scale.

Thus, the fact that the federal government spends about $28 billion a year on road construction, compared with about $6 billion on mass transit, isn't necessarily the outrage that current sprawl politicking suggests. It surely can be argued that shifting some spending toward mass transit makes sense, though such purposes can be far more quickly and flexibly achieved by better bus service than by the rail lines that urban planners adore. But roads and car culture aren't a crazed anti-people conspiracy. The challenge is to make roads and cars serve us better while bugging us less.

The Michigan Land Use Institute, an impressive new smart-growth organization, recently proposed a sensible middle course along these lines for Traverse City, Michigan. Local officials currently plan to bracket the metro area with a high-speed highway bypass. The Michigan Land Use Institute offered a detailed alternative plan for improving existing major arteries and left-turn lanes, speeding up traffic within the city but preventing cars from being sucked away from established commercial zones. Compromises like this admit that the automobile is here to stay as America's primary means of transportation but seek to adjust car culture to avoid construction that isn't really needed.

Sprawl is caused by affluence and population growth, and which of these, exactly, do we propose to prohibit? The Census Bureau projects that the American population will expand to 394 million by the year 2050, half again the level of today, with almost all that growth attributable to (legal) immigration, which currently runs at about 900,000 arrivals per year. Do we want to halt or deeply restrict immigration? Unless we do, the country's stock of houses, roads, commercial space, and other construction must substantially enlarge in decades to come.

Meanwhile, the reason Americans keep buying more housing, more SUVs, more swimming pools, and other space-consuming items is that they can afford these things. And so ... affluence is bad? The literature on sprawl is rife with sarcastic references to the square footage of the typical new home and to the spread of McMansions—"spacious" is a sneer word in this context—as if cramped quarters or adjoining walls are what human beings ought to prefer, damn it! There are many philosophical reasons why people might be more content with a modest lifestyle. But these are arguments about materialistic culture and the modern soul, not about appropriate housing-lot size. If prosperity puts the four-bedroom house within reach for the typical person, it's hard to see why public policy should look askance at that.

Sprawl complaints might justify exclusionary zoning. If political opposition to sprawl leads to smarter growth, or more parks and wildlife habitats, or better bus service, or better traffic regulation, then the public good is served. The trouble is, some sprawl concerns would not serve the public good.

Aspects of environmentalism have long been criticized as using ostensible concerns about nature to serve private purposes such as property values. Sprawl theory is now being hailed as an alternative to this. Since every person, rich or poor, is equally inconvenienced by being stuck in traffic, *The New York Times* recently opined, Gore's livability initiative will "take the lingering elitist tinge off environmentalism." Actually, it's the other way around. Sprawl control has much greater potential to wander into have-and-have-not inequity than does, say, regulation of CFCs or dioxin.

In a passage of his 1992 book *Earth in the Balance*, Gore worries about a glade of trees removed to build a new housing subdivision near what was then his

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Virginia home. "As the woods fell to make way for more concrete," he writes, "more buildings, more parking lots, the wild things that lived there were forced to flee." When he wrote these words, Gore was himself living in a large suburban house built on cleared woodland and parking his car on concrete. Why are comfortable homes and long driveways all right for those who already possess them, but threatening when others ask for the same?

Adopting smart-growth policies and better transportation plans is something every community should do. But, if communities take the kind of steps that would really stop sprawl, they would confer a windfall on those already entrenched, while damaging the prospects of those who long to attain the detached-home lifestyle. It's not for nothing that the Supreme Court has long taken a dim view of regulations whose official purpose is to keep communities leafy and quiet but whose effective result is to lock in the favored at the expense of new arrivals.

Everybody wants symbolic action against sprawl, but real action would drive people crazy. Gore's "livability agenda" matches great p.r. ring with hardly any content. Its chief plank is federal support for about $9.5 billion in local land-preservation bonds. This is a fine idea, though a one-shot infusion that won't change the larger panorama of land-use politics. (For my own admittedly politically improbable proposal to require developers to preserve at least one acre of land for every new one they build on, thus making ever-greater increments of land preservation a permanent part of American public policy, see "Greener Pastures," TNR, March 2, 1998.) The rest of Gore's initiative are inoffensive, small-change items, such as $10 million to help schools become "community centered" or $17.2 million for safeguarding ex-urban agricultural land—an amount that will buy roughly two farms per state.

Announcing the livability initiative, Gore mused about "the Lakota storytellers who described the vast clearness of the Western sky as a metaphor for inner courage." It's easy to see why he would rather discuss the Lakota than the emphatic actions that would really cut down on sprawl. One would be exclusionary zoning. Another would be the denial of environmental or sewer permits, which brings business expansion to a halt. Another would be revoking the hugely popular mortgage-interest deduction. Another real-world restriction would be raising gasoline taxes.

If mortgage interest were not tax-deductible, and gasoline prices were quadrupled (putting them on a par with Europe's), demand for those sinister spacious homes would wane, enthusiasm for public transportation would rise, and the market could be relied on to take care of the rest. But do *you* want to be the politician who advocates a $3-per-gallon gasoline tax? Think of Bill Clinton's panicky 1996 retreat from a 4.3-cents-per-gallon gas-tax increase—not exactly a metaphor for inner courage. There is little chance any major candidate will advocate higher gasoline taxes during Campaign 2000. And, if the political world is afraid of this moderate reform—which would not imperil car culture, just trim some of the tonnage off our SUVs—where is the will for real change?

Other anti-sprawl proposals have similar implausibility quotients. Rusk and other theorists, for example, call for consolidating urban and suburban governments to prevent local entities from playing one off the other in development contests. It's an admirable idea, and a few cities and their suburbs have voluntarily combined, notably Indianapolis and Jacksonville. But, if you live in the ring burbs around Newark, Detroit, or Washington, D.C., you'd have to be dragged kicking and screaming into combination with their corrupt, incompetent governments. Some have proposed that combining the tax bases of suburban and urban jurisdictions would reduce sprawl contests and promote equity by improving schools in poorer neighborhoods. The latter goal is totally justified, but where is the political support for this idea? Tax-base sharing is currently foundering in Vermont, one of the most liberal states.

And, if you want decisive action against sprawl, don't you want land-use planning? Imagine how poll numbers will shoot up for the candidate who proposes that! Regional land-use planning has done well by the city of Portland, which has both controlled its boundaries and seen its economy prosper. But Portland is a special case; its geography imposes physical limits on growth. Portland's high land values and high quality of life tell us land-use planning and prosperity are not incompatible, which is an important lesson for local officials who traditionally have felt compelled to approve any and all construction. But the kind of land-use planning that's worked in Portland may not work nationally, especially since Portland has pretty much closed its doors to population growth, which is not an option for the country as a whole.

Hey, these movie-theater lines are too long! You bet the lines at the movie theater are too long. My proposed solution is to forbid you from going to the movies. Your proposed solution is to forbid me. We both claim a noble public purpose—the shorter movie line. But sometimes what seems like concern for the public square is really a declaration of "me first."

Thoughtful study of smart-growth alternatives is in everyone's interest and will lead to improvements in suburban livability. But many of the people who now grouse about sprawl themselves live in spacious houses, own an SUV, owe their good fortunes to the growth economy, and would be entirely outraged if there were not ample roads, stores, restaurants, and parking wherever they went. They wish everybody else would get off the highway so that they can have the road to themselves. In this way, the sprawl issue touches on the selfish downside of democracy. Smart growth is a smart idea, but those who pursue it must be wary of favoring the enfranchised and the organized, which our politics does too much of already. •

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The flawed premises of liberal foreign policy.

A WORLD IMAGINED

By Charles Krauthammer

It is a common contemporary lament that it has become uniquely difficult to formulate a coherent foreign policy in the post-cold-war world. Oh, how much easier it all was during the great twilight struggle. "Gosh, I miss the cold war," said President Clinton in 1993, only half-jokingly. "We had an intellectually coherent thing. The American people knew what the rules were."

Now, coming from liberals, this is disingenuous. After 20 years of deriding conservative anti-Communists for being blinded by the Soviet threat, liberals today wistfully recall how the Soviet threat brilliantly illuminated the landscape—and lament how obscure it all is with the lodestar gone. Ah, the golden age when everything was easy and we all joined hands in the cold war battles of ... what? Nicaragua? SDI? El Salvador? Grenada? The Pershing missile deployment? Liberals opposed nearly every anti-Communist foreign policy initiative of the last 20 years—the very ones that helped to win the cold war.

No matter. In fact, the post-cold-war world, like the cold war before it, is not all muddle. There can be clarity. And it begins by understanding that contemporary liberalism does have a foreign policy. Liberals may not know it. No one has yet articulated it. But, almost a decade after the cold war ended, after six years of Democratic governance, there it is: a coherent interlocking set of ideas that govern how America should act in the world.

Conservatives have not seen it any more clearly than liberals. The conservative contribution has been to attach adjectives to the Clinton foreign policy such as indecisive, tepid, tentative, weak, timorous, feckless. All of which are true. But adjectives do not make an analysis.

There is a liberal foreign policy. It is readily discerned from the pronouncements and the actions of the Democratic administration of the past six years. It rests on three pillars:

Internationalism, the belief in the moral, legal, and strategic primacy of international institutions over mere national interests.

Adapted from a speech at the Manhattan Institute, January 11, 1999.

Legalism, the belief that the sinews of stability are laws, treaties, and binding international contracts that can domesticate the international arena.

Humanitarianism, the belief that the primary world role of the United States is, to quote Madeleine Albright upon her swearing-in as ambassador to the United Nations, "to terminate the abominable injustices and conditions that still plague civilization."

Taken together, they reflect a vision of the world that is coherent, consistent, and dangerously at odds with the realities of the international system. It is truly a world imagined.

First, internationalism. You hear the talk incessantly: the United States did this or that in Bosnia or Iraq or Somalia in compliance with, in adherence to, or under authority of this or that Security Council resolution, a.k.a "international legality." Indeed, in Clinton's February 1998 speech at the Pentagon laying the foundation for an attack on Iraq (one of many that, in fact, never came), the president cited the need to enforce Iraqi promises made under cease-fire conditions that "the United Nations demanded—not the United States—the United Nations," after the Gulf war.

Notice the hierarchy. Here is the president of the most powerful nation on earth stopping in midsentence to stress the primacy of commitments made to the U.N. over those made to the United States. Not surprising from a president whose first inaugural address pledged American action when "the will and conscience of the international community is defied."

But the international community is a fiction. Different countries have radically different geographies, histories, and levels of power, and therefore radically different interests. There may be ad hoc coalitions of interest. Nations may occasionally unite in some emergency (World War II, the Gulf war). But there is no natural, inherent, or enduring international community. What community of interests is there among, say, Brazil, Iraq, Zimbabwe, and the United States?

Community? The international arena is a state of nature with no enforcer and no universally recognized norms. Anarchy is kept in check, today as always, not by some hollow bureaucracy on the East River, but by the will and power of the Great Powers, and today, in

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particular, of the one great superpower.

Why should the United States take seriously, morally seriously, as Americans do, the pronouncements and decisions of that preeminent international governor, the U.N. Security Council? By what logic is action that is taken with the blessing of the butchers of Tiananmen Square, the ex-apparatchiks of Moscow, or the cynics of Paris inherently more worthy than action taken by the people of the United States in Congress assembled and by direction of the president?

And yet, this feeling is deeply ingrained, as George Bush understood. That is why he garnered international cover for the Gulf war—essentially an American operation—through all manner of Security Council resolutions. He did it, however, out of necessity. The Democratic Congress likely would not have approved the Gulf war had it not received the blessing of the U.N.

The problem with contemporary liberalism is that it believes this nonsense. It sincerely believes that multilateral action—and, in particular, action blessed by the U.N.—is in and of itself morally superior to, and more justifiable than, the United States unilaterally asserting its own national interest.

This belief runs very deep—all the way back to Wilson and FDR. But, while they could be forgiven for hoping in the shadow of the two world wars that a parliament of man would actually bring peace and comity, we, 50 years later, have no such excuse.

The U.N. consists of three parts: a corrupt bureaucracy forever aggrandizing itself; a General Assembly, which is a playground for the most powerless nations on earth to rant and vent their rage at the powerful, i.e., the United States; and the Security Council, originally conceived as a place where the World War II victors would in unison direct the fortunes of the world. It has turned into a place where the lesser Great Powers are able to deflect, decry, denounce, and often defeat the will of the preeminent superpower by exercising—or threatening to exercise—the veto. The French and the Chinese and the Russians must wonder why we put up with this. Certainly none of them would were our positions reversed.

Legalism is the belief that safety and security are achieved through treaties and that therefore the main work of foreign policy is to sign pieces of parchment. It is hard to think of an administration in American history with a greater mania for writing, signing, ratifying, and producing international agreements than the Clinton administration. From the very beginning, its principal foreign policy goal has been to secure signatures on a dizzying array of treaties on chemical weapons, biological weapons, nuclear testing, nuclear nonproliferation, and anti-ballistic missiles. (And, if not for Pentagon pressure, it might even have signed the disastrous treaty banning land mines.)

This penchant for treaties reflects a coherent vision of what constitutes progress in international relations. At root, the idea is to transcend power politics with a regulated system of agreements that creates new norms, obligations, and constraints on the behavior of otherwise lawless nations. Ultimately, the idea is an international system that recreates domestic civil society.

But this is hopelessly utopian. The basic difference between the international system and domestic society is that in domestic society there exists a monopoly of the means of coercion, an enforcer, a sovereign. There is generally also a preexisting community of norms.

Neither of these conditions obtains in the international arena. Britain, North Korea, and Burundi have no shared norms about how nations ought to behave. And, even if they did, there is no international authority to force compliance with these norms, as the police and courts do in domestic society. And, in any social system, whether of individuals or nation-states, where there is no enforcer, there can be no real law.

You can, of course, have trivial laws—a fishing treaty between friends such as America and Canada. Or you can have the appearance of law—a treaty of deterrence between enemies, say, the United States and the old USSR. But the latter exists not because of law but because of power. Let one power get stronger or bolder than its rivals, as did Germany of the '30s, and such treaties mean nothing.

Did we learn nothing from the 1920s, with their frantic attempt to regulate the Great Powers' capital ships through naval conferences? Or the Kellogg-Briand pact, in which the signatories (including Germany and Japan) swore off war forever—an absurdity that won U.S. Secretary of State Frank Kellogg the 1929 Nobel Peace Prize?

And we have contemporary experience. Before the Gulf war, Iraq was a member in very good standing of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). It passed every one of the International Atomic Energy Agency's more than 30 inspections. And what did we discover after the Gulf war? That Iraq had clandestinely been running not one but four separate uranium enrichment programs. It was a fortuitously timed war that prevented Saddam from getting the bomb. Under the NPT, he would have had it six years ago.

And look what happened after the war. Under UNSCOM inspections, the most intrusive weapons inspection regime ever devised by man, the Iraqis continued to develop their weapons. Indeed, they managed to hide huge biological and chemical weapons programs. These were revealed only by the happenstance of high-level defections following a family fallout among the ruling Tikriti clan. Had Saddam's sons-in-law not defected to Jordan, we might still not know about the tons of anthrax and toxins produced under the nose of UNSCOM.

And yet, for the Clinton administration, treaties are the very soul of foreign policy. And what have they wrought? Parchment that is either useless or worse than useless. A Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) that even its advocates admit is unverifiable. Negotia-

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tions for a biological weapons regime that will intrusively inspect American pharmaceutical operations and are guaranteed to miss the small concealable plants in which Libya, Iran, Syria, and a host of other miscreants are even now cooking up anthrax and botulism. A comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty that either degrades the reliability of our nuclear deterrent—in which case it is back-door disarmament and thus dangerous to American security—or it doesn't, in which case it is a perfect nullity.

The Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, a treaty 27 years old made with a country that no longer exists to counter a threat that no longer exists but that prevents us from building defenses against the coming threat of missile attack by rogue states. So thorough is the liberal enthrallment with arms control that the Clinton administration actually strengthened and broadened the treaty with its 1997 so-called "demarcation" agreement that will make it infinitely harder for the United States ever to amend or leave it.

And, finally, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, an opportunity for nations with no desire to build nukes to posture virtuously and for nations with every such desire to cheat. What, after all, is a signature on the NPT worth? In 1992, North Korea announced that it would withdraw from the NPT and build nukes. What was the penalty? The United States promised it two shiny new $2.3 billion nuclear reactors and an indefinite supply of free oil in return for a promise—since broken—to merely freeze its nuclear program.

When you point out that these agreements will not stop the bad guys from acquiring nasty weapons, the defenders have a fallback: these pieces of parchment make a statement. They "provide us with a valuable tool," explained Senator Joseph Biden at the opening of Senate hearings on the CWC: "moral suasion of the entire international community to isolate and target those states who violate the norm."

This is fiction (the "international community") deploying fatuousness ("moral suasion") to enforce a fantasy (international "norms"). Consider an even more morally compelling international "norm": the prohibition against the actual *use* of chemical weapons. (The CWC merely bans possession.) The Geneva Protocol on that dates back to 1925. Well, in 1988, in the face of this venerable norm, Saddam dropped poison gas on rebellious Kurds, killing 5,000 innocents.

How did the "international community" respond to this open, shocking violation of the Geneva Protocol? It found even "moral suasion" too strenuous. It did nothing.

Today, Iraq flagrantly violates the "norms" imposed upon it regarding weapons of mass destruction. How does the Security Council—the executive committee of the "international community"—respond? It has *loosened* the embargo on Iraqi oil.

And now the final pillar of liberal foreign policy: humanitarianism. What is "the new core problem in post-Cold War politics that a new [American] strategy must address," asked Leslie Gelb, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, in late 1994. "The core problem is wars of national debilitation, a steady run of uncivil civil wars sundering fragile but functioning nation-states and gnawing at the well-being of stable nations.... The main strategic challenge for the United States is to develop plans for multilateral action to stem civil wars without drowning in them."

Is stemming civil wars really the main strategic challenge for the United States? There are civil wars raging today in Sudan, Sierra Leone, and the Congo. Thousands are being killed with the utmost brutality. We are moved as individuals by these terrible tragedies. But do they really engage the strategic interest of the United States?

Of course not. And yet here is Madeleine Albright speaking for the administration about the American role at the height of our involvement in Somalia: "The decision we must make is whether to pull up stakes and allow Somalia to fall back into the abyss or to stay the course and help lift the country and its people from the category of a failed state into that of an emerging democracy. For Somalia's sake, and ours, we must persevere."

For Somalia's sake, sure. But for ours? That was yesterday. Today the Clinton administration has located a "vital interest" in Kosovo, or, more precisely, in autonomy for the Kosovar Albanians. Not independence, mind you. Not direct rule from Belgrade. But autonomy, for three years, under NATO occupation led by 4,000 American troops. A vital American interest? What is going on here?

What is going on is a total misconception of the role of the world's only superpower. Peacekeeping, mending civil wars, or, as Gelb calls it, quelling teacup wars, is not a job for America. It is a job for Canada. For middle powers with no real enemies, humanitarianism can be a strategic mission. For a superpower, it is not.

A few days before the Haiti operation, Madeleine Albright was being questioned by *The Washington Post* regarding the necessity of invasion. She countered: If the cold war were still on, and "if Haiti were threatened by communism, none of you would be raising these questions."

Well, of course not. There would then be a clear strategic reason for the operation. It is only because there is no strategic reason—no Soviet Union, no communism—that this strategically purposeless invasion could, in her mind, be justified. For Albright, to have a strategic reason—meaning having a reason that satisfies a selfish national interest—is to taint the rationale for the use of force.

This is the key to understanding the amazing transmutation of cold war and Gulf war doves into Haiti and Bosnia and Kosovo hawks: an abiding liberal antipathy to any notion of national interest. Indeed, in the new liberal orthodoxy, it is only disinterested intervention—in a word, humanitarianism—that is pristine enough to

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justify the use of force. Violence undertaken for the purpose of securing interests is not.

Thus Anthony Lewis calls George Bush a "gutless wimp" for letting the Serbs overrun Bosnia and derides him for going to war with Iraq "because of oil." Any wimp, you see, can go to war for some vital national interest. Real men go to war for reasons of right.

For post-cold-war liberalism, self—i.e., national—interest is not just a dispensable criterion for action but a disqualifying one. The apparent liberal flip-flops on intervention now begin to make sense. In 1991, in the Persian Gulf, where American interests were seriously engaged, the Democratic Party voted overwhelmingly against going to war to defend those interests. In Haiti, where American interests were at most tangentially engaged, they mounted a 20,000-man intervention.

When liberals say that Bush really invaded Iraq because of oil and Panama because of the canal, they mean it as a criticism. But it is a self-evident justification. These liberal hawks are saddled with a terrible confusion. The confusion is between individual and national morality. In private conduct, altruism is the ideal; for a nation, however, it can mean ruin. Nations are not individuals. They live in a state of nature with no higher authority to protect them. If they do not protect themselves, they die. Ignoring one's interests, reacting in fits of altruism, is an invitation to a ruinous squandering of blood and treasure.

And, for the United States, it is a distraction from real threats (such as the threat from North Korea) and a strain on our ability to meet them. Yes, we should risk war when our will and conscience are challenged. But only when our most vital interests are challenged, too. Foreign policy is not social work.

Internationalism, legalism, humanitarianism. These are not just disparate woolly-headed instincts. They come coherently together in service of an overarching idea: to remake the international system in the image of domestic civil society.

Why is this a chimera? Because what holds civil society together are a supreme central authority, the sanctity of contracts, and the goodwill, civility, and decency of the individual members. But what holds the international arena together—what keeps it from degenerating into total anarchy—is not a central authority, not the phony security of treaties, and not the best of goodwill among the nicer nations. What stability we do enjoy is owed to the overwhelming power and deterrent threat of a superpower like the United States that defines international stability as a national interest.

It is lazy and shortsighted to see the new liberal internationalism as merely a reflection of weakness, sentimentality, anti-war residue, or other such instincts. Whether or not it is articulated, contemporary liberalism is animated by a vision. It seeks to establish an international order based not on power but on interdependence.

As Cordell Hull, FDR's secretary of state, said upon returning from the Moscow conference of 1943: "There will no longer be need for spheres of influence, for alliances, for balance of power, or any other of the special arrangements by which, in the unhappy past, the nations strove to safeguard their security or to promote their interests."

The liberal internationalist idea had always been to transcend power politics, to transcend narrow national interest, and ideally to transcend the nation-state itself as it is now understood. The nation-state is seen as some kind of archaic residue of a primitive past, an admission that the international arena has not been domesticated as it should be, but remains untamed.

Which is why liberal thinkers have so enthusiastically embraced the notion that geoeconomics—with the new information technologies and the easy movement of capital across borders—has brought about an irreversible decline in sovereignty. They do not just celebrate this development. They want to help it along. They don't just believe in the decline of sovereignty. They want to accelerate that decline and ultimately extinguish sovereignty altogether. Only then will the international arena truly be broken to the mold of domestic civil society.

This also explains why they have such discomfort with America's overarching global power: to achieve their vision, America must, in the end, be subordinated, domesticated. We have to move from a unipolar to a multipolar and ultimately to a democratized international system where all live under new self-governing international institutions and new self-enforcing international norms.

American hegemony and American power is thus an affront to the vision of a new democratic international community with norms that apply to everyone. The project of liberal foreign policy is to build an entangling web of interdependence; the point is to tie down Gulliver with a million little strings—i.e., to equalize power relations by restraining an overweening America. Who do you think the ABM Treaty or the landmine treaty is meant to restrain? Gabon?

Thus the grand project of liberal foreign policy today is not to enlarge American power. The measure of success of foreign policy is how it promotes and strengthens this new "international community." You measure that by the number of treaties signed, teacups mended, and U.N. mandates vindicated.

The ultimate irony is that this is traditionally the vision of small nations. They wish to level the playing field with the big boys. For them, treaties, international institutions, and interdependence are the great equalizers. Leveling is fine for them. But for us? The greatest power in the world—the most dominant power relative to its rivals that the world has seen since the Roman empire—is led by people who seek to diminish that dominance and level the international arena. It is a vision, all right, an amazing vision of self-denial in the service of self-delusion. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Three Actors

It's a hard job being an admirer of Christopher Walken. Not because of the huge quantity of work that he does nor because of the quality, which is usually as good as the part and script permit, but because of the scripts that he often chooses.

I saw Walken first on Broadway as the French king in *The Lion in Winter* (1966), his first sizable acting role—he had been a dancer—and he took the stage like a panther claiming territory. Not long afterward, he entered films. He has to date appeared in sixty-six. In most of them, or anyway it seemed like most, he played icy criminals, portrayed more authentically than the film deserved but still disheartening stuff to anyone with an eye on Walken's career. He made return visits to the theater from time to time, usually in Shakespeare and Chekhov roles (except for one play that he wrote for himself), but many of those performances seemed perfunctory genuflections in a cathedral before he hurried back to the marketplace.

There were splendid exceptions in his film career: in *The Deer Hunter*, the Pennsylvania steelworker who ends up a Russian roulette addict in Vietnam; the dancer in *Pennies from Heaven*; the silken sadist in *The Comfort of Strangers*. Though he hasn't done much comedy, he proved as the Marine captain in *Pulp Fiction* that he can turn it neatly. On the whole, however, he has seemed more busy than progressive.

Now Walken gets another chance at comedy in **Blast from the Past** (New Line), and he makes the crinkly most of it. He plays a young Los Angeles scientist in 1962 who has a pregnant wife (Sissy Spacek). The scientist is convinced that nuclear destruction is imminent and has built a fall-out shelter under their house that is just as large and well-equipped as the house above it—better stocked, in fact. During the Cuban missile crisis he becomes convinced that a nuclear bomb is en route, takes his wife down to the shelter, seals the time-lock doors—for 35 years—and is confirmed in his actions by the crash of a plane in their yard upstairs, which he assumes is a Soviet-Cuban bomb attack.

The bulk of the picture is about his son (Brendan Fraser), who is born in the shelter, educated by his parents, reaches 35 before the doors unlock, and then goes upstairs. Of course he meets a girl (Alicia Silverstone) and goes through all the experiences of a young man in a brand-new environment. (Hardly an original film ploy. Remember, for one instance, Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Twins*.) But the Walken performance is more interesting than his son's. At the start he gives us a slightly nutty, square but genial man, replete with corny jokes; and we see this man go through 35 years as if we were watching one of those camera records of a plant's growth.

It's one of Walken's smaller roles, but it's warmly rewarding, especially when viewed against his frequently satanic career. It reheats enthusiasm.

Norman Rodway was born in Ireland and began his acting career there, but has done most of his work in England. He is hardly known in this country, and I'm sad to say that **The Empty Mirror** (Lions Gate) may not do much to change that fact. Rodway's performance in this film, which really *is* the film, is the work of a commanding, highly experienced talent.

The director was Barry J. Hershey, who had the original idea and co-wrote the screenplay with R. Buckingham. It started, we are told, with an image: Hitler standing next to a film projector watching himself on the screen. But this Hitler speaks English, as do Goebbels and Goering and Eva Braun, who also appear in the picture. It all takes place in a sort of huge cavern full of furniture and equipment, along with a uniformed secretary who types up Hitler's spoutings and some uniformed children who appear when needed as chorus.

In a fantasy, which this film obviously and somewhat laboriously is, anything is permissible so long as the piece moves to some reason for existence. *The Empty Mirror* does not. It simply treads on and on while Hitler news-clips flash, with Rodway's Hitler exhorting and raging, conversing angrily with the other people, except for Eva, and meeting his finish. Most of what this Hitler says we have already heard. Never mind credibility: what is the point of it all?

For me, the only point was in watching and listening to Rodway. He is now 70 and has been acting since 1953, mostly in the theater, where, amidst a great many other roles, he has done much Shakespeare with the Royal Shakespeare Company. Plentiful TV, few films. He was an ideal choice for this Hitler role particularly because of his voice. (I think I remember a photo of him as Brecht's Hitler, Arturo Ui, in a London production.) We all know the effect of the

FILMS WORTH SEEING

The Children of Heaven. *A small brother and sister in Tehran face a private crisis when a pair of sneakers is lost. Gentle and reserved, not cute. (Reviewed 2/22/99)* **Hands on a Hard Body.** *Documentary about a Texas contest for a pickup truck. Flavorsome real-life characters. (3/8/99)* **The Last Days.** *Documentary based on present-day interviews with five survivors of the Holocaust in Hungary. Complimentary adjectives are almost out of place. (3/8/99)* **Shakespeare in Love.** *Fictitious fun about the way that* Romeo and Juliet *was written. (1/4&11/99)*—**SK**

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Hitler voice, like being beaten about the head with a flat iron rod that heats up from time to time. Rodway has it perfectly. He doesn't imitate the newsreels; he plays the man who is in those newsreels, except that he does it in English. It's a fine maniacal achievement, and I hope that at least connoisseurs of acting will see it, though it's in a peculiar film.

Robin Wright Penn is at the opposite end of the spectrum from Walken and Rodway. She had virtually no training and no theater experience before she began in films, and she has been in them only since 1987. I saw her first in *Forrest Gump*, where she played the hero's strayed and ill girlfriend like a quiet oboe solo in a gassy hymn of a picture. Other films, equally unworthy of her, were *She's So Lovely* and *The Crossing Guard*. She had a small but memorable part in *Hurlyburly*, and now she has the female lead in the worst film she has yet been in, **Message in a Bottle** (Warner Bros.). This one, unlike *The Empty Mirror*, will probably be widely seen because it's a Kevin Costner biggie (and has Paul Newman in a supporting role).

Message was made from a recent best-seller, but it's like a tearjerker of the 1930s. What's more, one of its chief plot devices is a reminder of a 1930s hit. In *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, Jean Arthur is a slick city reporter who conceals her identity from a sweet country fellow, Gary Cooper, in order to get a story from him. While doing this, she falls in love with him. When Cooper finds out her profession, love is threatened. Well, here it's Robin Wright Penn and Kevin Costner.

Penn (who added that name when she married Sean Penn) is extraordinary. First, her face. The oldest sagacity about film is that there are faces the camera loves or doesn't love. The camera is enamored of Penn. From any angle, her face is not just beautiful, it is haunting, tacitly grave even in comedy scenes. Her voice is pleasant, and she understands something about what words mean, or ought to mean, to an actor. And true feeling wells out of her.

What her future will be, what the film world will allow it to be, whether she will grow, who can tell? It might turn out that protecting her gifts, rather than trying to enlarge them, is her wiser course. In any case, we can all be glad that she is around. •

The truth about child abuse and the truth about children.

Against Innocence

By Margaret Talbot

I.

On August 12, 1983, a woman named Judy Johnson placed a call to the police department in Manhattan Beach, California. She had a crime to report: her two-year-old son had been sodomized at his preschool. And that was how it started. What kept it going, what made Judy Johnson's allegation virtually unkillable, even as it began to look more and more controvertible, is another story, one whose implications we have neither reckoned with nor escaped.

Johnson, as it turned out, was not the most reliable of narrators. Within two years, she had been diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic. (This was shortly after she had engaged the police in a stand-off, menacing them with a shotgun from her front door.) Within four years, she had died of liver failure induced by alcoholism. By then her stories had lurched into Gothic grotesquerie. Her son's ordeal at the McMartin preschool, a family-run operation with a long and placid history in its prosperous community, had included, she claimed, being made to watch the sacrifice of animals and human infants, to ingest urine, blood, and feces, and to accompany his teachers on airplane flights to Palm Springs and into a labyrinth of underground tunnels where one of the accused "flew in the air" and the others "were all dressed up as witches." By then, too, Johnson had accused various elected officials, along with models whom she saw in advertisements and strangers passing in cars. The prosecutors on the case—some of them, anyway—regarded her as an unpleasant joke. "You want to hear what Judy says happened now?" court records show one of them razzing his colleagues. And later: "Jeez, I wish Judy would just disappear and leave us alone."

Moral Panic:
Changing Concepts of the
Child Molester in Modern America
by Philip Jenkins
(Yale University Press, 302 pp., $30)

Erotic Innocence:
The Culture of Child Molesting
by James R. Kincaid
(Duke University Press, 352 pp., $24.95)

Pictures of Innocence:
The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood
by Ann Higonnet
(Thames and Hudson, 256 pp., $39.95)

Kidnapped:
Child Abduction in America
by Paula S. Fass
(Oxford University Press, 324 pp., $27.50)

Yet the chain of events that Judy Johnson's delusions set in motion seemed, and almost was, unstoppable: an avalanche, a runaway train, all the tired metaphors of inexorability come to mind. The McMartin school case eventually encompassed 354 counts, 41 witnesses, and 369 alleged victims. In an effort to locate the kiddie porn for which the McMartin toddlers had allegedly been exploited, local investigators, along with the FBI and INTERPOL, seized and reviewed thousands of blue movies and photos. In an effort to find bones, bodies, burial sites, clothing—any evidence at all of the ritual sacrifices that supposedly went along with the sexual abuse—they searched 21 residences, seven businesses, 37 cars, three motorcycles, one farm, and a national park in South Dakota where one of the defendants had once gone camping. Gloria Steinem put up money so that a team of archeologists and geologists could excavate beneath the school looking for secret tunnels. (Their existence was never established.) The police offered a $25,000 reward, no questions asked, for a single pornographic photo of a child taken at the McMartin school. (None ever materialized.)

Therapists and social workers cocooned the parents of Manhattan Beach in support groups, in which they

Margaret Talbot is a fellow of the New America Foundation.

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were encouraged to vent their grief and to elicit further "secrets" from their children. The result of such ministrations was that by 1985, as Debbie Nathan and Michael Snedeker write in *Satan's Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of a Modern American Witch Hunt* (1995), "hundreds of South Bay children were naming ministers, reporters, soccer coaches, aerobics instructors, grade school teachers and babysitters as abusers.... If the charges were true, one could only conclude that over the course of a decade, one-third of the children in the South Bay had been molested, raped, and then terrorized so utterly that not one had dared to tell." Indeed, under the coaching of satanic-ritual-abuse experts, who picked up the smell of panic and jetted in from all over North America, some of the McMartin school parents became convinced that any number of local celebrities, including members of the Anaheim Angels baseball team, had been involved in the abuse conspiracy. Seven preschools in the area were eventually shut down. And the trial itself was to last three years—from April 1987 to July 1990—making it the longest-running (and the most expensive) criminal proceeding in American history.

In the end, as we know, for the story has been told many times now, the McMartin case did not yield a single conviction—only a welter of mistrials, acquittals, and deadlocks. It turned up no forensic evidence to support the charges that the school had been the scene of ritualized sex abuse. Nor, for that matter, did any of the other prosecutions of alleged sex-abuse rings in American day-care centers—McMartin was the first of about several dozen cases like it in the 1980s, including the notorious Little Rascals and Wee Care prosecutions—turn up such evidence.

The defendants in these cases included a large number of women, which in a way was not surprising, since most day-care workers are women. Still, this fact was surprising—or it should have been—since women also make up a small percentage of child molesters in general (about 12 percent, according to the National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect) and a minute percentage of those who molest very young children. And the sudden focus on day care was odd, too, since children are far more likely to be sexually abused by adults who are related to them than by teachers or day-care workers. Reliable studies based on reports from state agencies suggest that perhaps 2 percent of confirmed child sex-abuse cases take place in day-care or foster-care settings, and virtually all of those cases involve one perpetrator. The diabolically organized conspiracy to molest—the crime posited by the day-care prosecutions of the late '80s and early '90s—is a chimera.

And yet, even as the charges grew more and more implausible, and corresponded more and more suggestively to a toddler's notion of unspeakable transgression rather than to any known profile of adult sexual perversion—in Maplewood, New Jersey, a 26-year-old day care worker named Kelly Michaels was accused of playing "Jingle Bells" on the piano in the nude and licking peanut butter from the genitals of her young charges, and one of the McMartin children said a teacher had served her feces in chocolate sauce—the child abuse professionals held fast to their mantra: "Believe the Children."

For several years, moreover, during which innocent people, many of whom were themselves the parents of young children, were sent to prison, the press by and large went along. "The horrors may only have started with sodomy, rape, oral copulation, and fondling," *Newsweek* confidently reported of the McMartin allegations in April 1984, and added the following consumer tip: "The Manhattan Beach case serves as lesson for any parent: choosing a pre-school is an exacting decision—'as important as choosing a college' says Pittsburgh childcare authority Marsha Poster Rosenbloom." *Time*'s account noted that a horse was slaughtered in front of the toddlers to intimidate them into silence, but the magazine neglected to ask how this messy procedure was accomplished without detection in a busy preschool in the middle of town, where parents and teachers came and went throughout the day. "Parents," *Time* chided, "were too trusting, assuming that separation anxiety was the reason their children cried when dropped off at school."

By the late '80s, then, the notion that many, many day care workers went into the field only to sate their Sadean lusts for small children, and that schools were places fraught with sexual "stranger danger," and that childish innocence was under unprecedented assault from the forces of evil, had sufficient credibility to darken the nightmares of mothers and fathers across the country.

II.

The question, of course, is why—and the answer is not merely of historical interest. For while it is true that we have come to the end of this particular cycle of prosecutions, we are still in the grip of the same debilitating belief that kept those prosecutions alive. We seem to think that we can protect children from sexual depredation chiefly by imagining them as chaste and empty vessels—as though only if they were such figments of our frightened imagination would the moral horror of their violation be great enough to call up society's resources on their behalf. The innocence of young children—which is to say, the sexlessness of young children—is a newly reclaimed article of faith for many child-abuse professionals, who contend that overt sexual curiosity in children is often a sign of pathology or abuse. (To adopt this point of view, they have had to beat back the ghost of Freud, but that hasn't been so hard of late.) The de-eroticization of childhood is also a talismanic notion for many of the rest of us, who want to believe that prelapsarian virtue may still be found somewhere, clean and gossamer-white. Our children seem to provide a foundation for our belief in the possibility of pure and perfect innocence, and what else can?

But this interpretation of childhood teaches more about American adults than American children. Can we really not protect our children as they are? For children need not be sexless in order to trigger our solicitude and our censorship of certain aspects of adult life. They need only be what they are: smaller than us, newer to the world, more easily frightened, not yet capable of certain kinds of cognition and will, and so on. There is such a thing as infantile sexuality, even if sex is for grown-ups. And the sentimental tenet that the value of our children lies in what they are not—corrupted, sexual, us—entails some unkindness and some injustice to them. Molestation is not the only terrible fate that can befall a child, though to read much recent fiction, or a large sub-genre of self-help books, you might think otherwise.

The re-Victorianized hypervigilance about "good" touch and "bad" touch that makes many teachers—even preschool teachers—wary about holding or hugging small children is one sad and practical consequence of such attitudes. So much can be read into a gesture now, so much assumed about its motivations and its capacity for contamination. "We advise our members not to touch the children, especially as the children grow older," the spokeswoman for a New Jersey teacher's union told *The New York Times* last year. "We have to be careful because there have been so many false accusations against teachers."

Similar policies at many day-care centers now prohibit workers from changing a baby's diaper without another adult present and discourage them from holding toddlers in their laps. Joseph Tobin, who teaches early childhood education at the University of Hawaii, has written thoughtfully about the kinds of fears and precautions that he encounters among

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students who are preparing to be preschool teachers now. In one classroom discussion, about an exuberant four-year-old girl who liked to kiss little boys, half of Tobin's students thought that such behavior "should alert us to the possibility of sexual abuse." Tobin was disturbed that what seemed to him normal behavior should automatically trigger such alarm.

> I asked myself ... [W]hy would something as ordinary and innocent (at least to me) as a preschool kissing game strike so many of my students as dangerous? In the weeks that followed students described other situations they found problematic: children playing doctor; a field trip to a dairy farm; a male teacher holding a little girl on his lap.... Children's sexuality, sexual play, sexual knowledge, adults touching and being touched by children—these struck my students as dangerous and threatening to children, their caretakers, or both.

For their part, some parents, too, seem to take an unseemly pride in policing the sensual pleasures—for both parties—of caring for young children. As one father recently boasted on an Internet chat group, "I remember being *scrupulous* to avoid any inappropriate stimulation of my infants while making sure they were clean."

Our preoccupation with people who actually do assault children has made us wary of people who never would assault them. These days we are all suspects. Of course, most of us are not drooling in carnal thralldom to the very young. Most of us are perfectly able to draw the line between an awareness of the erotic strand in the relationship between parents and children and the callous exploitation of it. So we have become suspects not so much by acting differently with our children as by acting the same, while all around us, and especially in the helping professions, the definitions of suspicious behavior change.

A child psychologist named Toni Cavanagh Johnson recently conducted a survey of 369 mental-health professionals in which she asked various questions about what sorts of family intimacy are "appropriate" and "inappropriate." When she asked, "What ages are suited to children and parents being nude around each other?" 55 percent answered "No age," suggesting a conviction that even infants ought to be decently attired at all times. Almost 40 percent thought parents should never take baths with their children, no matter how young those children are. To label as puritanical the sort of domestic routine that this "scrupulousness" would entail is almost beside the point. What really astonishes is the stringency of the ideal, the almost utopian impracticality of it. How is a mother home alone with her baby supposed to shower or dress? Should she leave him unsupervised in the other room lest he catch a glimpse of her defiling nakedness?

When it comes to sex play between children, the attitudes of many child-abuse professionals these days can be even more censorious. They might be thought of as pre-Freudian, so shocked are they by evidence of erotic curiosity and desire in children, except that they are so often self-consciously post-Freudian: that is, prone to indignant dismissals of the whole notion of infantile sexuality and brimming with conviction that little kids who play doctor, as the euphemism has it, could only have caught the idea from a nasty grown-up. These attitudes have spawned a new and intrusive monitoring of so-called "sexually reactive" or "sexualized" children—which in its worst guise can mean forcing kids who have engaged in consensual exploration with siblings or friends to register as sex offenders or enroll in behavioral therapy programs.

There are now several hundred such programs treating "molesters" younger than twelve, according to Judith Levine, a journalist who has reported extensively on them. Levine has written about a twelve-year-old boy in New Jersey obliged to register as a sexual offender after he groped his eight-year-old brother in the bath and about a nine-year-old boy in San Diego who was placed in foster care for two years after he admitted touching his younger sister's "vaginal and anal areas" and "placing a pencil in her buttocks." His sister, too, was removed from their mother's home for two years.

Of course, the sex-abuse panics of the 1980s also gave rise to a backlash. Organizations such as the False Memory Syndrome Foundation and researchers such as Richard Ofshe and Elizabeth Loftus tried to refute the theory that horrifying memories of child abuse could be suddenly "recovered" intact, hauled gleaming to the surface in the obliging net of total recall. Journalistic skepticism kicked in at last, and helped produce books such as *Satan's Silence* and Lawrence Wechsler's *Remembering Satan*, along with an extraordinary three-part documentary on the Little Rascals case made by an Israeli journalist named Ofra Bikel. Wildly inflated statistics that had been reported in the mid-'80s as fact—such as the claims that twenty to fifty thousand children are abducted in the United States each year and never seen again, or that kiddie porn comprises a $5 billion industry in the United States, or that 40 percent of American girls were sexually abused as children—were by the mid-'90s getting the critical scrutiny that they deserved.

Yet the backlash has done damage, too. It has given aid and comfort and ammunition to some of the more brutish opponents of the entire therapeutic profession, and to Freud-bashers in particular. (That this always involved a profound misreading of psychoanalysis—it was Freud, after all, who introduced the notion that many memories of childhood "seduction" were fantasies, not literal transcriptions of reality—has not stopped Frederick Crews and others for whom the excesses of the recovered memory movement have been a godsend.) It may also have stirred up undue skepticism about real cases of sexual abuse. Backlashes are like that. They sweep up everything that came before them, the sensible along with the bizarre; and they cannot really liberate us from the logic of the previous regime because they are still arguing within its terms.

III.

There were proximate causes, it is true, for the great Satanic day-care scare of the '80s. Chief among them were the interviewing techniques of some of the child-abuse professionals called in on these cases. It was not merely that they routinely asked lead-

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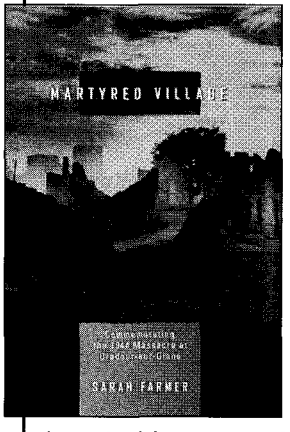

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ing questions: "Can you remember the naked pictures?" one of the McMartin interviewers prompts a child, though neither picture-taking nor nudity has been mentioned in the interview. It was not merely that they asked these questions over and over again, and with little apparent willingness to accept "no" or "I don't remember" as an answer. It was not just that, with brightly colored puppets and anatomically detailed dolls and wheedling hypotheticals, they encouraged imaginative speculation about events rather than the free recall of them. ("Let's *pretend* and see what *might have* happened.")

No, they were even more egregious. They overtly rewarded those who "disclosed" with hugs and lavish praise, and they bullied those who did not, telling them that all the other "smart" kids had owned up to the "yucky secrets" at McMartin. Even now, reading excerpts from those interviews can make you suffer for the children all over again. "Are you going to be stupid, or are you going to be smart and help us here?" the interviewer demands of an eight-year-old boy, who has just denied having ever seen anyone play "Naked Movie Star" at the McMartin school. After a few more vain attempts to winkle out an allegation, the interviewer turns to the puppet who is supposed to be the boy's stand-in and says: "Well, what good are you? You must be dumb." When a child twice says he has no memory of the "naked pictures," his interrogator instructs him to "think about that for a while, okay? Your memory might come back to you." Salacious details are often supplied by the questioner him- or herself, as in the following exchange about the elderly director of the school:

> Interviewer: Who do you think played that game [horsey]?
> Child: Ray and Miss Peggy.
> Interviewer: Ray and Miss Peggy? Did Miss Peggy take her clothes off?
> Child: Yeah.
> Interviewer: I bet she looked funny, didn't she? Did she have big boobs?
> Child: Yeah.
> Interviewer: Yeah. And did they swing around?
> Child: Yeah.

In many of the other day-care abuse cases across the country, too, transcripts show social workers and police investigators cajoling and browbeating children who said they were not molested, bribing them with promises that they can go home to mommy and daddy or get their teacher out of prison if only they will tell. Sometimes the emotional rewards offered to those who do "disclose" give off their own unsavory odor. "Do you want to sit on my lap? Come here, I'm so proud of you," says one social worker in the Kelly Michaels case. "I love big girls like you that tell me what happened—that aren't afraid because I'm here to protect you.... You got such pretty eyes.... I'm jealous. I'm too old for you."

For the most part, these interviewers were not merely nasty or inept. Many of them were deeply and sincerely committed to their mission of child protection. Unfortunately, that mission often required them to accept the doctrine then in vogue that a denial of abuse may be the best indicator that abuse has occurred. By that logic, believing the child could mean believing what a child did not say, what, in fact—out of fear or shame, the thinking went—he might insistently and repeatedly refute. Consider the following exchange between two adult investigators on the Kelly Michaels case and a four-year-old boy:

> Interviewer: Did she put a fork in your butt? Yes or no?
> Child: I don't know, I forgot.
> Interviewer: ... Oh come on, if you just answer that one, you can go.
> Child: I hate you.
> Interviewer: No you don't.
> Child: Yes I do.
> Interviewer: You love me I can tell. Is that all she did to you, what did she do to your hiney?
> Interviewer #2: What did she do to your hiney? Then you can go.
> Child: I forgot.
> Interviewer #2: Tell me what Kelly did to your hiney and then you can go. If you tell me what she did to your hiney, we'll let you go.
> Child: No.
> Interviewer: Please.
> Child: Okay, okay, okay.
> Interviewer: Tell me now ... what did Kelly do to your hiney?
> Child: I'll try to remember.
> Interviewer: What did she put in your hiney?
> Child: The fork.

In other exchanges, the interviewers seem scarcely to listen, so wedded are they to their own version of what must have happened. Consider this tone-deaf back-and-forth between a social worker and a child, again in the Michaels case:

> Interviewer: Do you think that Kelly was not good when she was hurting you all?
> Child: Wasn't hurting me. I like her.
> Interviewer: I can't hear you, you got to look at me when you talk to me. Now when Kelly was bothering kids in the music room....
> Child: I got socks off.
> Interviewer: Did she make anybody else takes their clothes off in the music room?
> Child: No.
> Interviewer: Yes.
> Child: No.

You don't have to believe that young children make inherently unreliable witnesses, or even that they are significantly more suggestible than adults, to conclude that this sort of grilling—especially when it takes place in an atmosphere of rising panic, replicated at home by parents who can't seem to stop themselves from believing the worst—is likely to elicit some falsehoods.

Recently, a group of psychologists led by Sena Garven at the University of Texas in El Paso devised an experiment in which they tried to recreate the McMartin interviewing techniques, based on their reading of the interview transcripts. Sixty-six children between the ages of three and six received a visit at their preschool from a jolly graduate student who introduced himself as Manny Morales. He read them a story, placed a sticker on each child's hand, and gave each a cupcake. A week later, 36 of the children were questioned about this incident by interviewers who used the full arsenal of McMartin techniques. The other 30 were asked merely "suggestive" questions. Of the kids in the first group, 58 percent made false allegations against Manny—saying, for instance, that he stole, threw a crayon, bumped a teacher, or told the child a secret that she wasn't supposed to reveal to anyone else. By contrast, just 17 percent of those who were asked merely suggestive questions, with no social incentives to fabricate, did so.

IV.

In the end, though, proximate causes only get you so far. Bigger explanations are demanded. The interviewers in the day-care cases may have been overzealous, and the stressed-out parents may have been easily spooked, but what primed the rest of us to believe these stories? Surely there were larger reasons for an entire culture's preoccupation with child sex abuse; and these are precisely what two astringent and important books—*Moral Panic* by Philip Jenkins and *Erotic Innocence* by James R. Kincaid—seek to provide.

Jenkins and Kincaid are less interested in addressing the objective threat of child molesting than in asking why at particular historical moments—and with no solid evidence that it is on the rise—it can seem so much more omnipresent and alarming than at others. "Prominent among what are accepted as self-evident facts in contemporary America," writes Jenkins, "is the belief that children face a grave danger in the form of sexual abuse and molestation. This menace has certain well-known, stereotypical characteristics. Sexual abuse is pervasive, a problem of vast scope; molesters or abusers are compulsive individuals who com-

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mit their crimes frequently and whose pathologies resist rehabilitation or cure. Sexually deviant behavior often escalates to violence or murder. Sexual relations with adults invariably cause lasting damage to the children involved; a battery of psychological explanations exists to account for any failure by the victim to perceive harm from the abuse or to recognize its severity." Yet none of these were accepted social facts a quarter of a century ago. And their promotion to that status now is not necessarily a sign that the truth has finally triumphed, that these beliefs are correct whereas the previous beliefs were incorrect.

Why, these books ask, does sexual molestation often dominate our discussions of child abuse—and our talk shows, our TV movies of the week, our custody battles, our middle-of-the-night anxieties—when physical abuse and neglect are far more common and far more likely to kill a child? In a 1997 survey of substantiated child abuse cases in 31 states, for example, the largest number of cases—54 percent—were instances of neglect. 22 percent were cases of physical abuse, and 8 percent were of sexual abuse. (The rest were considered cases of either emotional maltreatment or "other.") In 1996, a federal government survey (based mostly on data from the National Incident Study on Child Abuse and Neglect) put the percentage of sex abuse at 12 percent of the approximately one million substantiated or strongly suspected cases of child abuse and neglect nationwide.

For Kincaid, these sorts of observations warrant a much more audacious attack on the ways in which "our culture has enthusiastically sexualized the child while denying just as enthusiastically that it is doing any such thing." He has produced an impassioned argument that, in construing children as "the species incapable of practicing or inciting sex," we inevitably eroticize them, for "defining something entirely as a negation brings irresistibly before us that which we are trying to banish." The result is the oily fear that we can only escape the temptations of pedophilia by concocting demons, staging witch trials, and regarding the eroticization of children as an unspeakable evil about which we must nonetheless speak and speak and speak. "Breaking the silence," as the rabble-rousing slogan has it; though surely silence is no longer the problem.

To permit ourselves the unfamiliar thought that skepticism about our culture's emphasis on sex abuse is not a denial or a trivialization of such abuse, it helps to be reminded just how contingent our current views really are. Jenkins's book, a more sober and straightforward work of history than Kincaid's, is the place to begin. Jenkins argues that theories about sexual abuse, and public concern about it, have not evolved in any sort of linear way, but have fluctuated over the course of the century. To a certain extent, the peaks of anxiety have corresponded to moments at which women entered the workforce and children entered day care in large numbers: the late '40s, the late '70s and early '80s. To a certain extent, too, these panics have been produced and manipulated by moralists who wanted to denounce sexual "deviance" in general, and homosexuality in particular. Yet they have also followed a cyclical pattern. The hysteria of the late '40s, when sex maniacs were, as J. Edgar Hoover put it, thought to be "rov[ing] America almost at will," gave way in the '50s and '60s to an attitude of relative unconcern about sexual molestation; and this attitude in turn gave way to what Jenkins calls the child abuse revolution, beginning in the mid-'70s.

For the psychologists and the child protectionists and the reporters and the law enforcers of each era, only the consensus that had prevailed in the era that preceded them—the underestimation of child sex abuse or the overestimation of child sex abuse—seemed to matter. "In neither our conceptualizing of the problem nor our devising of

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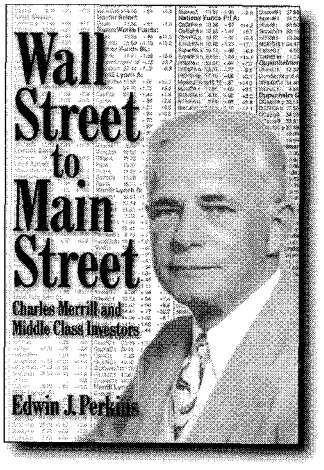

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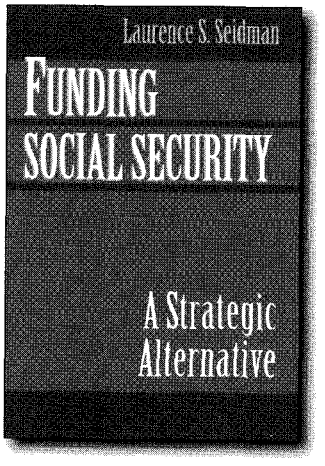

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counter-measures," Jenkins observes, "is there much evidence that we have learned from history." This is depressing. And it is also not depressing, for it holds out the possibility that if we ever do grasp the extent to which we have been locked into a cycle of overreaction and underreaction, we might escape it.

The notion of the sexual abuse of the child had to wait, of course, on the notion of the child. As a practical matter, this meant that it could hardly have been conceived as a distinct category of malfeasance until perhaps the early nineteenth century. And given that sexual pathologies were scarcely theorized before Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis in the late nineteenth century, its appearance was, in the event, postponed until then. As we now know from the work of Phillipe Ariès, Lawrence Stone, and others, early modern Europeans tended to treat children like miniature adults, as corroded by willfulness and sin as their elders, and in no particular need of their own protections or their own amusements.

Before the nineteenth century, children were neither honored as creatures of superior sensibility and imagination nor shielded from adult sexuality, as they would be in both the Romantic and Victorian conceptions of childhood. And sex between adults and the people we now call children was far more frequent than it is today, for the simple reason that the concept of children as sexual innocents, and of childhood as a uniquely pure and precious and vulnerable stage of life, did not, for all intents and purposes, exist. As late as the 1880s and 1890s, the age of consent set by most jurisdictions in the United States reflected this idea: it was ten in most states, and in some states even younger.

There are historians who refute this version of things—and who have dug up letters and diaries that suggest parents were more tender with their children, even in the seventeenth century, than Ariès in particular would have had us believe. Still, you have only to trace the evolution of children's portraiture, as Ann Higonnet does in her elegant book *Pictures of Innocence*, to feel convinced that childhood did not begin to be idealized, and to acquire its modern sentimental valence, until the late eighteenth century. A vast emotional territory separates the stiff and solemn little aristocrats of Van Dyck from the pink-cheeked, barefooted insouciants of Gainsborough or Reynolds. And by the time you get to the dreamy moppets of Millais's mass-produced prints *Cherry Ripe* and *Bubbles*, in 1879 and 1886, European culture is plainly more enamored of infantile innocence.

Of course, the idealization of childhood—the Romantic notion that "heaven lies about us in our infancy"—can co-exist with manifold cruelties to real children. By the late nineteenth century, however, official tolerance for such contradictions was waning. The first child protection organization, the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, was established in 1874. By 1910, there were more than 300 such societies across the country. Meanwhile, a popular movement of the 1880s and 1890s helped to raise the age of consent in most states to sixteen or eighteen. (The paradoxical result, as Jenkins observes, is that the age of legal consent was steadily rising while the average age at which adolescents experienced puberty steadily fell between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries: biological maturity and legal maturity had diverged.) By the first decade of the new century, a typical Progressive-era coalition of feminists, social workers, and moral reformers, backed by the muckraking press, had succeeded for the first time in defining the sexual violation of children as a social problem.

Indeed, anyone who thinks that our generation was the first to discover the true extent of children's sexual vulnerability will be taken aback by the frank and fretful tone of the first public discussions about child molesting, at the turn of the century. The authoritative textbook *A System of Legal Medicine*, which appeared in 1894, contained the radical claim that "rape of children is the most frequent form of sexual crime." In 1893, in his popular tract *Traffic in Girls*, Charlton Edholm sneered at the idea that a child could give informed consent to sex. Indeed, in his sympathy with child-victims, Edholm is recognizably modern: "When a big burly man fifty years of age is brought into a court of justice and confronted by the little ten-year-old victim of his lust, if he can prove that the child, for a paper of candy, consented to an act of which her childish mind is ignorant, that jury of twelve men—probably fathers of little girls themselves—will hold the child guilty and the man guiltless."

Vice investigators confirmed that child prostitution was flourishing in many cities. As one such smut-hunter in Philadelphia put it, "numbers of boys in knee pants are commercializing themselves openly on the streets for the practice of perversion." Stephen Crane even planned to write a novel about these boys—*Flowers of Asphalt*—though he later abandoned it on the advice of squeamish friends. By the turn of the century, it was known that children could and did contract gonorrhea and syphilis. Chicago's county hospital maintained an entire ward for children with venereal diseases. (Not everyone, though, was willing to accept the implications of these facts. In 1915, at a clinic in St. Louis, doctors diagnosed 66 cases of venereal disease in little girls. Unable to credit the idea that the children had become infected through sexual activity, they decided that badly designed toilet seats were to blame—which may have been the origin of this particular canard.)

By the early 1920s, organized feminism and the Progressive-era reform coalitions were on the wane, and the anxiety that they had provoked about child molesting faded with them. Only in the late '30s and early '40s did it begin to build again, in the wake of several well-publicized murders of young girls in New York and California—one committed by a man who had spent much of his life in prison for sex crimes. Those crimes were real, and horrible; but Jenkins's point is that the coverage of them, and the response of legislatures and law enforcement agencies to them, had almost nothing to do with the objective threat posed by sex murderers, who were as rare as they were grisly. The reaction had more to do with cultural jitters about defenseless women and children left on their own while men went off to war.

Indeed, the most alarmist articles about sex crimes to appear in the popular press before the 1980s appeared in the late '40s. In 1949, *Colliers* magazine reported that sex crime "by the rapist, the sex psychopath, the defiler of children" had "virtually gone out of control." Bands of pedophiles were "roaming about, abusing, molesting, luring and perhaps one day killing.... The sex hoodlum, hanging around schools with comic books and bubble gum to lure his victim, has imbued parents with a stark new fear." J. Edgar Hoover himself signed his name to an article called "How Safe Is Your Daughter?" that ran in *American Magazine* in 1947: "The most rapidly increasing type of crime," he claimed, "is that perpetrated by degenerate sex offenders.... [It] is taking its toll at the rate of a criminal assault every forty-three minutes, day and night in the United States ... depraved human beings, more savage than beasts, are permitted to rove America almost at will."

A crime wave is always relative. If you live in rural Japan, a single murder in your village will seem like a plague; if you live in New York City, last year's murder rate will seem like a blessing. But as Jenkins points out, the late '40s were actually "one of the safest eras in American urban history, when rates for all

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forms of violent crime were enviably low by the standards of later decades." To sustain the idea of an unprecedented sexual menace out there, law enforcement officials had to tweak the numbers and massage the categories.

And they did—conflating a variety of sexual unorthodoxies with the most brutal of sex crimes. Of 256 juvenile sex offenders—all boys—who passed through New York City Children's Court between 1928 and 1933, for instance, a quarter were being punished for consensual homosexual acts with boys their age. ("Excessive masturbation" and "speaking or writing obscenely" accounted for another 34 percent of the cases.) In New York City, 3,295 people were indicted for sex felonies between 1930 and 1939—but 59 percent of them were charged with statutory rape, which meant sex with any female under the age of 18, regardless of the age of the perpetrator. And Hoover could make his sensational claim that a sex crime took place every 43 minutes only by combining the statistics for forcible and statutory rape.

Even at the height of the panic, there was plenty of reliable, countervailing information that should have dispelled it. A number of states had established commissions to investigate the precise scope of the sex-psychopath threat, the existence of which they took as a given. Yet many of these commissions concluded by opposing the reigning consensus on sex crimes, showing that the number of such offenses had been exaggerated, along with the recidivism of sex criminals. The availability of this information did nothing, though, to block the passage of panicked and overly broad legislation, such as the so-called sex psychopath statutes.

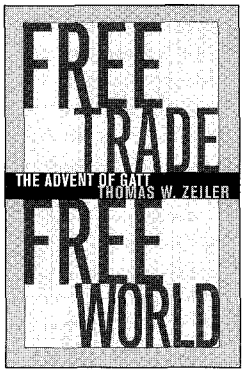
Under these laws, a person convicted of a sex crime—and sex crimes included acts that were often consensual, such as statutory rape or the vaguely defined sodomy—could be identified by a panel of doctors as a "sex degenerate" and confined indefinitely in a mental hospital. By 1950, such laws were in place in fifteen states; and fourteen more states would pass them over the next decade. Homosexuals were particularly vulnerable under the new legislation, since sodomy was a sex crime regardless of consent. In several states, no criminal charge was necessary to set the process in motion. A citizen's complaint—"There's a pervert on my block!"—sufficed. The only good news was that the statutes were seldom used; Jenkins says that the number of "sexual psychopaths committed annually during the 1950s would rarely have exceeded a couple of hundred." If anything, these low numbers ought to have convinced the courts that the sex psychopath laws were superfluous—that they were unconstitutional and unnecessary.

V.

But it was not until the early '70s that most were overturned. By then, a liberal backlash had set in. Journalistic reports in the '50s and '60s tended to stress the overreaction to aberrant sexual behavior and the way in which sex-crime laws could be exploited to allow the legal lynching of black men. At the same time, the psychiatric consensus about child molesting had softened, so that molesters were regarded as more pathetic than dangerous. (And even funny, as in the Dirty Old Man jokes of the '60s.)

At times the Kinseyism of the '50s and '60s—so professorially tolerant when it came to the varieties of human sexual experience—seemed to justify a smarmy, wish-fulfilling defense of sex between adults and children. Wardell Pomeroy, a researcher on the original Kinsey team, wrote that incest could be "a satisfying and enriching experience," resulting in "many beautifully and mutually satisfying relationships between fathers and daughters.... They have no harmful effects." And the equally wishful notion of the molested girl as a practiced seductress who wanted—no, needed—the sex she got (remember Carroll Baker in *Baby Doll*?) enjoyed an astonishing respectability in this liberal era.

For all the manifest creepiness of this view, however, there was something humane and measured about the argument that often went with it: that sexual abuse need not define a person, and need not be promoted into the overarching, all-explaining story that it has now become. In the view of many psychiatrists in the '50s and '60s, a hysterical reaction from parents and other authority figures only conveyed the message that any sort of premature sexual experience permanently defiled a child, rendering her dirty and damaged goods. As the sex researcher Paul Tappan contended, lasting psychological harm did not inevitably follow upon an episode of abuse, especially when abuse was defined broadly to include, for example, run-ins with an exhibitionist. "This is not to condone the offense," Tappan wrote, "but merely to emphasize that the implicit danger has been grossly exaggerated, and that the possible traumatizing of the individual is almost always a product of cultural and individual responses to the experience rather than because of the intrinsic value of that experience itself."



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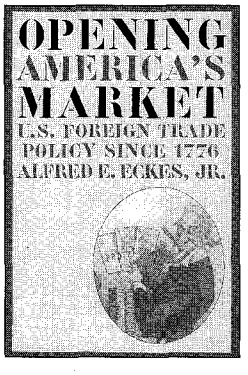

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Well, it all depends. There are forms of sexual abuse which one cannot imagine *not* leaving psychic scars. But psychic scars are not as common as we think they are. When it comes to indecent exposure, say, or to the kind of sex play between children that makes many adults so uncomfortable, Tappan surely had a point. Today, by contrast, there is a disturbing sense in which our preoccupation with sex abuse seems to place a greater value on a child's sexual purity than on anything else.

Even, at times, a greater value than a child's life. Kincaid provocatively introduces into this context the siege at Waco, Texas. It was carried out and justified in the name of preventing the molestation of children, "suggesting," as Kincaid writes, "that eighty-one deaths can be outweighed by violated innocence." And the insidious idea that sexual abuse seals a singular, inescapable doom can be found elsewhere, too. Consider the outpouring of public support for Ellie Nesler, the woman who shot and killed her young son's accused molester in the California courtroom where he was awaiting trial. Nesler was a folk heroine in 1993. Columnists mama-lionized her; teachers rallied their elementary school students to send her thank-you notes; bumper stickers crowed "Nice Shootin' Ellie." That Nesler would likely go to prison for her crime (she went on to receive a ten-year sentence), blighting her little boy's life all over again, did nothing to complicate this celebration of vigilantism. Or consider the recovered memory movement, in which the memories that count are almost always of sexual abuse, as though every secret sorrow grew from the same root, and every psychic poison seeped from the same vial.

In the late '70s and '80s, when feminists, psychotherapists, and anti-pornography crusaders started sounding the alarm again about child molestation, they were reacting—and rightly—to the element of trivialization in the previous era's treatment of sex abuse. Some correction was clearly in order. For a time, this took the form of heightened concern and well-considered legislation about child abuse in general. Eventually, though, a certain ideological zealotry began to infuse the movement.

On the right, anti-gay crusaders such as Anita Bryant invoked the threat of pedophilia in the schools to try to ban homosexuals from teaching. On the left, feminists began to argue that "father rape," as Susan Brownmiller called it, was the linchpin of the patriarchy. Pedophilia, in this view, was not a psychological abnormality, it was a cultural malady. Under the right circumstances, any man was capable of rape or child molestation, because every man was naturally, helplessly subject to the same barrage of misogynist stimuli. For young girls, sexual exploitation in the family was a sort of apprenticeship for sexual submission outside of it, and so on.

The radical core of this crazy idea melted away in time, but a residue of it remained, above all in the conviction that the veracity of personal memories of molestation should never be challenged because their status as a kind of religio-political testimony superseded any considerations of objective fact. Indeed, as the feminist rediscovery of child abuse melted into the therapeutic ethos of postfeminism, the inner life of the victim took on a kind of sanctity, an irreproachability. A person who had been molested as a child, or who thought she had been, was now a "survivor" of abuse, as someone might be a survivor of war or genocide.

Worse, what merely felt uncomfortable to a given person could constitute a brutal violation—and, if it took place in the family, an act of incest. As the best-selling book *The Courage to Heal*, the mother of all incest-survivor books, explained, child sex abuse could include "being forced to listen to sexual talk," being "fondled, kissed, or held in a way that made you uncomfortable," and "being bathed in a way that felt intrusive to you." The subjective logic of the new self-help books pointed toward a bold new conclusion: if you felt you had been abused, you had been abused. As *The Courage to Heal* put it, "violation is determined by your experience as a child—your body, your feelings, your spirit." (Almost everyone feels violated somehow, sometime.) The conviction that you had not been abused, on the other hand, was merely a symptom of "denial." As Roseanne Barr unfunnily declared, "When someone asks you, 'Were you sexually abused as a child?' there are only two answers: One of them is 'Yes' and one of them is 'I don't know.' You can't say 'No.'"

All this fervor helped to create various constituencies with a vested interest in publicizing the threat of sexual abuse: child advocacy groups; organizations and companies that promised to help you protect your children from kidnapping; therapists who specialized in recovered memories; clinical social workers, whose ranks had grown from 25,000 in 1975 to 80,000 in 1990; self-help authors; evangelical Christians who believed in satanic ritual abuse; feminist anti-porn activists; right-wing anti-porn activists; even the producers of "stranger danger" videos, of anatomically correct dolls, and of children's books such as *No More Secrets*, *It's MY Body*, and *It's OK to Say No*. Numbers were often fungible for these groups. And in the late '70s and '80s, many of them began circulating alarming statistics about the extent of sex abuse and related crime—statistics that were reported without skepticism in the press.

As both Jenkins and Kincaid show, many of those numbers were based on dubious research or on the indiscriminate merging of crime categories. Some sensationalistic studies lumped together "confrontation by an exhibitionist" or even exposure to pornography—the kind of experiences that would leave only the most delicate and otherworldly among us lastingly traumatized—with rape by a parent. And in the matter of the kidnapping of children, statistics were even more wildly inflated. In the mid-'80s, according to the historian Paula S. Fass in *Kidnapped: Child Abduction in America*, Senate and House committees heard testimony to the effect that "two million children" disappeared each year and as many as "five thousand were murdered through kidnapping and abduction." In fact, as a comprehensive study sponsored by the Justice Department later revealed, the number of "stereotypical kidnappings"—horrifying cases such as those of Adam Walsh or Etan Patz, in which children were taken by strangers who intended to keep them, held at least overnight, or transported fifty miles or more—numbered between 200 and 300 a year. Of those, somewhere between 43 and 147 children were killed.

A figure such as 1.5 or 2 million abductions each year could be derived only by adding in all runaways, "throwaways" (or abandoned children), and children taken by other family members, usually in the course of custody disputes. This latter group alone, according to the Justice Department's study in 1990, accounted for about 350,000 cases a year. It is a bleak enough statistic on the face of it—but it is worth noting, as the authors of the Justice Department study noted, that "most of these episodes lasted two days to a week, with very few, 10 percent, a month or more." In only 1 percent of the cases was a child permanently spirited away from one parent by another.

VI.

Now, you might argue that in the service of a good cause, such as the protection of children, exaggeration is not such a terrible thing. If alarming statistics mobilize people and free up funds, if they help to rescue even a few more children from intolerable circumstances, what is the harm?

The harm is considerable. Undifferentiated numbers make it difficult to mount an adequate policy response: abandoned infants, teenage runaways, and children snatched from the mall by malevolent strangers all require differ-

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ent sorts of help. Exaggerated numbers frighten parents unduly, and often about the most unlikely villains—elderly day-care teachers, closet Satanists. And when overblown figures are debunked, as eventually most of them are, the costs to the whole enterprise that they supported are often high. The public reacts with cynicism, a backlash takes shape, and so on.

Moral Panic is a fine and thoroughly researched work of history, and an enormously useful reminder that we have gone this way before. Like the sexual psychopath statutes before them, the sexual predator and community notification laws of the 1980s and 1990s combine civil and criminal penalties in a constitutionally worrisome way. Like those earlier laws, too, our contemporary versions are big, unwieldy contraptions designed to catch one rare class of criminal: the murderous, compulsive pederast.

In the end, though, the book's cyclical explanation is not entirely satisfactory. For one thing, as Jenkins himself acknowledges, the pattern that he identifies for the twentieth century—in which peaks of public concern about child molesting occur roughly every 35 years—falls apart in our era: "Far from marking a new era of indifference," the late '90s have been "characterized by the furor over sex predator statutes and the fear of cyberstalkers. The cycle has been broken in our modern era, when child abuse has become part of our enduring cultural landscape, a metanarrative with the potential for explaining all personal and social ills." Anyway, all cyclical arguments about history have something tautological about them. Peaks of interest in a given social problem occur because troughs of interest preceded them; troughs of interest occur because peaks preceded them. Well, yes. But why are some cultural anxieties more susceptible to periodic inflammation?

It could be the case, despite all of the best arguments of scholars such as Jenkins, that panics about sex abuse have recurred in the twentieth century (and that the current panic has persisted) because the incidence of sex abuse is increasing. One piece of evidence that might support this is the rise in the number of step-families in our divorce-ridden age, since some studies have shown that the rate of sexual abuse is as much as eight times higher in step-families than it is in biologically related ones. Over the broad sweep of history, however, this comparison is not quite so apposite. Before the demographic revolution of the late eighteenth century, when the average life span in the West began creeping upward, step-families were as common as grass. (This is why the wicked stepmother is a stock character in European fairy tales.) The only difference was that most remarriages came about as the result of death, not divorce.

Among the very poor, who could seldom afford either marriage (the license, the dowry) or divorce (the lawyers, the gifts to magistrates and other fixers), cohabitation and "blended" families—as we now sweetly refer to them—were the norm. And given that taboos against sex with children were far weaker than they are in the modern era, it would not be at all surprising to learn that what we now call sexual abuse occurred frequently in early modern Europe and America—as often and perhaps more often than it does now. Some historians of sexuality and the family have already concluded as much. "Based on an overview of history," writes Vern L. Bullough, "this author would state that adult/child and adult/adolescent sexual behavior occur less frequently now than they did in the past."

Moreover, the evidence indicating that the rate of sexual abuse has risen in more recent years—since the early '60s, say—is not all that strong. Certainly the reporting of it has increased, but that is not the same thing. And some of the very forces that brought to light many genuine cases of abuse—mandatory reporting laws and a general suspiciousness of funny uncles, doting step-daddies, and men who just adore children—have also inspired a certain number of false reports. This is true not only in the spectacular context of, say, satanic ritual abuse trials, but also in the more routine context of divorce proceedings. While angry former spouses have always been prepared to believe the worst about one another, and to hurt one another, the charge that one parent—almost always the father—was sexually abusing their child has become a popular weapon only recently. And since even an unproven accusation can do damage—curtailing visitation, sowing suspicion—truth is not necessarily the object. A study carried out by the University of Michigan Project on Child Abuse and Neglect found that 14 percent—and perhaps as many as 23 percent—of the sex-abuse charges that emerged during divorce cases turned out to be false.

Meanwhile, reports of sexual abuse as a percentage of all child abuse reports have actually been declining—from a high of 16 percent in the mid-'80s to about 7 percent now, according to one national survey. It is hard to know for sure how to interpret this; but one explanation is that the earlier upsurge was a somewhat artificial product of the publicity and the panic about child abuse in the mid-'80s, and that the current numbers are more realistic. Another interpretation can be found in a recent report from the National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse, which surmises that "after over ten years of attention to this problem, it is possible that the reservoir of cases involving years of abuse have been so reduced ... that child welfare is less burdened with such cases. Further, improvements in professional practice and the rapid expansion of child assault prevention services have produced an environment in which cases are identified closer to the onset of the abuse." In other words, social workers and child advocates have simply gotten better at preventing or limiting sex abuse.

What is clear is that over the last century, and especially over the last thirty years, the taboo against sex with children has become much stronger and more overt. As other sexual taboos—on adultery, on homosexuality, on the explicit depiction of sex in movies and advertisements—have crumbled away, the stigma on pedophilia has become all the more marked, all the more precious. It is a kind of bulwark of civilization now—a contemporary dividing line, like that favored by nineteenth-century German philosophers to divide men from beasts. As Paula Fass puts it, "The very need for some sexual boundaries somewhere in a society rapidly shedding earlier taboos made sex with children more repugnant and more socially explosive, increasing both the pressure to create more protective legislation and the tendency to report breaches."

This is the positive—in the sense of morally wholesome—interpretation of our obsession with child sex abuse, and I happen to think there is a great deal to it. For one thing, it helps explain why the most recent panic seems to have set in for the duration. But this argument, too, has its blind spots—above all, the failure to acknowledge that the fetishization of this last taboo has a dark side. It seems to lead us toward an idealized and curiously denatured view of children: as saintly Little Evas, dainty and delectable packets of Edenic virtue who never lie and who can be presumed to know nothing about sex. And yet the more we insist on this innocence, the more we eroticize it. The fervently forbidden is almost by definition a goad to desire. Hence the latent and not-so-latent pedophilia that oozes out of our popular culture—Calvin Klein ads featuring strung-out waiflets; neo-Balthusian fashion spreads; kiddie beauty pageants (and the interminable frenzy about JonBenet Ramsey); the ever-popular schoolgirl-in-a-uniform motif of many rock videos and songs; and so on.

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VII.

James Kincaid's book is an unusually bracing, even brilliant, exploration of this paradox. It is also, at times, very exasperating. Kincaid's tone is knowing and oddly jokey, and he is a little too fond of what he takes to be the showstopping rhetorical gesture. "It would hardly be an overstatement," he writes, "to say that the subject of the child's sexuality and erotic appeal, along with our evasion of what we have done by bestowing those gifts, now structures our culture." Well, yes, it would be an overstatement. He shows scant sympathy for parents, who may fear some fate for their children not because it is statistically likely, but because it is singularly horrifying; and who may be forgiven for doing so, even as they are reminded of the odds. (Fass's sensible history of child abduction in America deflates the same bloated statistics, but with more delicacy and tact.)

Yet Kincaid's book has the great advantage of situating recent sex-abuse scandals—the McMartin case and others like it, the accusations against Michael Jackson and Woody Allen—in an appropriately larger context, which is the history of the cultural image of childhood. Kincaid, who is a professor of English literature, points out that "the development of the modern child and modern ideas on sexuality grew up over the last two centuries hand-in-hand," so that what we think about when we think about children is often the absence of sexuality.

For the Romantic poets, who drew a dreamy, besotted portrait of childhood that quickly lent itself to popularization, "the child was gifted with spontaneity, imaginative quickness, and a closeness to God." Chiefly, though, the child was defined by what he was not. As Kincaid writes, he was "*free* of adult corruption; *not yet burdened* with the weight of responsibility, mortality, and sexuality; *liberated from* the 'light of common day.'" Early in the nineteenth century, childish innocence had a larger and more spiritual connotation, but by the time of the Victorians its meaning had narrowed, mawkishly, to the absence of carnal knowledge.

The innocent child is the erotic child, for innocence is made to be lost. "We see children as among other things, sweet, innocent, vacant, smooth-skinned, spontaneous and mischievous," Kincaid observes. "We construct the desirable as among other things, sweet, innocent, vacant, smooth-skinned, spontaneous, and mischievous." Thus we regard children as erotic while regarding "an erotic response to children not merely as criminal but as criminally unimaginable." And the bind this puts us in makes us a little crazy, and leaves us unhealthily preoccupied with the Gothic narrative of child-molesting. Worse, it diverts attention and resources from more prevalent forms of cruelty to children: emotional and physical neglect, physical abuse, abandonment, and the sort of soul-stunting poverty in which such mistreatment often festers, unchecked.

Kincaid finds evidence of erotic innocence in what might seem to be some unlikely places, but for the most part he persuades us that it is there. He is right to say that a fair amount of contemporary pop culture is saturated with "pedophilic nostalgia," a devaluation of maturity nested within a cloying fetishization of childhood. This image has a history, of course: think of J. M. Barrie and the boy who wouldn't grow up—indeed, of the whole tradition of Victorian children's literature, in which the dream of childhood recedes down a gold-tinged river, with a heartbreaking plish-plash of oars. In our contemporary culture, though, it has taken a form that is at once cruder, more commercial, and more self-consciously psychological.

Every therapeutic discussion of the inner child—so drippily enamored of itself—partakes of this idealization. So, in a way, do the writings of Robert Fulghum, who tells us we learn nothing of consequence after the maximally cute age of five. And, as Kincaid points out, so do plenty of Hollywood movies—and often in mildly more prurient fashion. Consider the much-loved film *Stand By Me*, which appeared in 1986, and featured, in Kincaid's words, four adorable "outcasts with horror-show fathers [who] get in trouble and stand by one another in homosocial devotion. But it's an image frozen in time: the film believes as passionately as J. M. Barrie that life ends at twelve, the adult narrator at the end reflecting 'I never had any friends later on like the ones I had when I was twelve. Jesus, does anybody?'"

Kincaid is right, too, to identify a spate of movies in which "a child, most often a boy, possessed either of no father or a bad one, is isolated, sexualized, and imperiled, whereupon he or she runs into an adult, often a male, who is down on his or her luck, outcast, misunderstood, sensitive, on the lam, romantically irresistible—usually all of these, and always the last.... The plot creates a special space, harbors the pair for a few moments from an unfeeling world that soon, however, crashes in and kills or exiles the adult." This has been the basic plot, in recent years, of *Sling Blade*, *The Professional*, *A Perfect World*, *The Client*, *The Man Without a Face*, and other movies. In their portrait of children as redeemers of grown-ups—precocious but cherubic intercessors put on earth to remind damaged adults of what they have lost—these movies have almost nothing to say about the complicated world of actual children.

Indeed, this sort of treatment of childhood can actually be a mask—and not a particularly convincing one—for the resentment of children. For the flip side of the angel-child is the demon-child: the ghoulish cliché of films from *The Bad Seed* to *The Omen* to *The Good Son*, in which the audience roots for the destruction of the enfant terrible, and by proxy for the punishment of all aggravating, demanding, incorrigible, high-spirited, sexually mischievous children everywhere. The nostalgia for childhood and the hatred of children are not unrelated; they are, in fact, intimates. How could they not be? We always resent what we retrospectively fetishize: the world we have lost, but only now speak of so lovingly.

And there is more. Children grow up and leave us, even though we have poured our hearts into them. That is how it is meant to happen, but it doesn't always make the abandonment easier to bear. Children, as Kincaid puts it, "demand everything, give nothing; they are ungrateful ... 'how sharper than a serpent's tongue it is to have a thankless child!' moans King Lear—and my parents and yours." If we are lucky, if we have done our job right and been favored by fate, they not only outlive us, they outshine us, too. And they remind us that we will die. If there is such as thing as child-hatred, then it is very old and very deep, and so entwined with the love and the care of children as to be inextricable from them. And as old and deep as it is, it acquires a particular edge in a society that exalts youth and innocence to a preposterous degree.

These arguments may seem a little fancy and abstract, but it makes sense to think about them in the grimly concrete context of child sex-abuse investigations. In McMartin and similar cases, the pole-star presumptions guiding social workers and police officers all borrowed something from the idealized vision of the innocent child. One of those presumptions was that a child never lies. Another was that a child in possession of what seemed to be precocious sexual knowledge was a child who had been molested.

Now, there has been a great deal of sophisticated research conducted over the last ten years or so demonstrating that cognitive factors (a child's mental development at a given age, the inherent susceptibility of memory, and so on) and social factors (the bias of the interviewer, the pressure exerted by parents and other authority figures, and so on) can all influence children to lie. (They can influence adults to lie, too.) These stud-

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ies do not necessarily agree on the kinds of circumstances under which children are most suggestible, or on the extent of their suggestibility. Yet there is a broad consensus that preschool kids are disproportionately more susceptible than their school-age counterparts. And the notion that very young witnesses could not lie—or embellish, or fantasize, or misremember—was always too simple, always a disservice to their minds and their capacities. As Stephen J. Ceci, a professor of developmental psychology at Cornell University and the author of many of the recent studies pointing to the suggestibility of child witnesses, has observed:

> Most humans will lie if the "ante" is high enough. For children, some motives are more powerful to prod them to lie than are others. For example, protecting a loved one or avoiding embarrassment appear to be more powerful incentives to lie than are sustaining a game or winning a material reward.... So the question isn't "do children lie?" but rather what are the conditions that elevate the likelihood that they will do so, and how does their risk of doing so compare with that of older persons' proneness to lie under similar conditions?

The second presumption—that children displaying sexual knowledge had likely been abused—might seem sound enough. In many cases, it is surely borne out. But it has also had consequences that are at once subtler and more pernicious. Consider the use of anatomically detailed dolls to prompt shy or frightened children to reveal abuse. This was an innovation of the 1970s, and at first it certainly seemed like an effective and compassionate one. But more recent studies have cast doubt on whether these dolls prompt more accurate recall, especially for the preschool-age children for whom they are usually deployed. The doll is supposed to be a body double for the child him- or herself; but since the vast majority of children this age lack the symbolic thinking required to make such a connection—most two- and three-year-olds, for example, cannot see the relation between a room and a scale model of it—this proposition turns out to be rather dubious.

More to the point, it seems that some children who have not been sexually abused will also play with an anatomically detailed doll in sexually suggestive ways—promptly removing its clothes, touching or grabbing its "genitals," sticking their fingers into various orifices. As the authors of one study judiciously put it, the "average amount of sexualized doll play by presumably non-abused children is not alarming, but there is enough of it to be potentially problematic in clinical or forensic situations." In other words, if you are prepared to see signs of abuse, you may see them even in behavior that, in other contexts or at other times, would be attributed to normal sexual curiosity.

And this is precisely the issue: at a time when there was comparatively little data available on what constituted normal sexuality in children, this vacuum was filled by people with a very narrow view of the possibilities. "Excessive" masturbation, mock intercourse with other kids, exhibitionism, "inappropriate" knowledge of sexual or anatomical terms, "unusual" interest in other peoples' genitals: each came to be seen as a symptom of abuse or some underlying pathology. In some cases, to be sure, these are symptoms, but this does not make the ambiguous cases any less ambiguous, or the entire business of judging what might be "excessive" or "unusual" in these matters any less subjective.

It might seem absurd to quantify such things, but a few recent inquiries have attempted to assess the prevalence of various "sexual behaviors" among children—and their results will surprise only those who assumed there was no such thing. A study that appeared in the journal *Pediatrics* last year asked the female caretakers of 1,114 children between the ages of two and twelve whether their children ever engaged in such activities as touching their own sex parts, trying to look at people when they are nude or undressing, touching or trying to touch their mother's or other women's breasts, and so on. Large percentages—between 20 and 60 percent, depending on the age and gender of the child, and the specific behavior—answered yes to these and similar questions. The study's authors concluded that "a broad range of sexual behaviors are exhibited by children who [sic] there is no reason to believe have been sexually abused."

And yet one must assume that these estimates are low, since children, especially when they reach the age of six or so, conduct much of their sexual play in private. For this reason, the relevant people to ask are not the parents, but the children—which is not exactly the kind of research that anyone would fund. One study in 1992 did the next best thing: it asked 128 female undergraduates at a small liberal arts college whether they had ever played a sexual game as children, and if so to describe in writing what it was and how they felt about it. 85 percent of the students remembered that, with other kids, they had played kissing games, shown off their genitals, imitated adult sex, or participated in what the study called, intriguingly, "experiments in stimulation." The mean age for this sort of stuff was seven and a half, and most of the women remembered it as normal and pleasurable—not as a psychological time-bomb. "At least a third," the study's sober authors reported with some astonishment, "indicated that they engaged in genital fondling (either with or without clothing), and a few reported oral-genital contact and attempts at sexual intercourse"—which is a long way from what adults like to think of as "playing doctor." In more than half the cases, no adult ever discovered what they were doing. If these women were children today, and somebody caught them in the act, how many would be identified as "sexualized" children and packed off to re-education camp?

VIII.

Should we, then, unburden children of the alluring innocence with which we have endowed them—not so that we might treat them brutishly, but so that we might see them whole, and thereby love them better? Kincaid thinks so. His proposal has implications for how we think about sex abuse, but its wisdom is much broader. You could say that it is finally about the reconciliation of realism with love.

The endeavor takes us back to Freud, as it should. The Freudian child is himself sexual, so there is no need to project on him an eroticized innocence. He is sexual, that is, but not sexualized. The child's erotic curiosity is a more or less naturally occurring phenomenon, and it is not imposed from the outside by a salacious culture. "If we posit openly that children are activated by sexual energy," as Kincaid puts it, "the evasive screens necessary for eroticizing them disappear; that is, it is necessary that they be 'innocent and pure' if they are to be alluring and also give adults the sentimental stories of denial and projection we find indispensable."

The unflinching and rather wry tone of Freud's writings on infantile sexuality conveys neither pedophilic nostalgia nor moral panic. The objective, rather, is knowledge, the sober acceptance of what is actually the case. "Small children whose attention has once been drawn—as a rule by masturbation—to their own genitals," Freud wrote, "usually take the further step without help from outside and develop a lively interest in the genitals of their playmates." Or: "The fable of the stork is often told to an audience that receives it with deep, though mostly silent, mistrust." Or: "It must ... be admitted that infantile sexual life, in spite of the preponderating dominance of erotogenic zones, exhibits components which from the very first involve other

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people as sexual objects." Or: "Small children are essentially without shame, and at some periods of their earliest years show an unmistakable satisfaction in exposing their bodies, with especial emphasis on the sexual parts." In most adults, a "peculiar amnesia" drops a veil over such memories, so that most of us forget the "evidence of love, jealousy, and other passionate feelings" that colored our early childhood.

Freud did argue that, after the age of about six or eight, a period of sexual latency lasting until puberty replaces the polymorphous perversity, voyeurism, and exhibitionism of infancy and toddlerhood. But even Freud's latent child is not sexless, not a pasteboard angel. In Freud's own day, of course, the hypothesis of infantile sexuality provoked more resistance—cruder and more know-nothingist resistance, too—than any of his other theories. What is astonishing is how radical the hypothesis seems still, or again, today.

Freud's idea of infantile sexuality created panic because it came to dispel panic. Many of his specific claims about the erotic properties of childhood are no doubt false or open to question, but the disabused air of those claims, their insistence upon the clarity of the mind in confronting the unreason in human life from its beginnings, cannot be gainsaid. It is certainly preferable to the joyless, prudish, inquisitorial mentality that hides behind its concern for "the children," but is really a concern for its own unhappiness, its own inability to live in the midst of all this imperfection.

In Freud, the reality of childhood sexuality is not in the least an invitation to its exploitation. It is, rather, an invitation to a more lucid variety of love. For surely adults will not be prevented from loving children tenderly and respectfully by the acknowledgment that children, too, are creatures of desire. There was a time, a very long time, when men were prevented from the tender and respectful love of women by an insistence on their purity, their fussed-over virginity. But hasn't the understanding that the object of desire need not be chaste, or that chastity need not be the only incentive to desire, bettered and made more moral the terms of physical and spiritual love between men and women? The acknowledgement that women have desires was hardly a call for the abuse of their desires. Its effect, indeed, was quite the opposite.

Love goes badly with illusions, all the torch songs notwithstanding. Love goes better with disillusion, if by disillusion we mean a clearer understanding of the object of love. We owe it to our children not to invent them according to our own needs and our own desires. It is our duty to know them as they are, and to nurture and to protect them on the grounds of what they are. Their enchantment is certainly great enough to survive our disenchantment; and our enchantment has anyway not served them very well. They are not pure. They are merely helpless and human. •

The Disputation of Desire

By Robert Alter

A Journey to the End of the Millennium by A. B. Yehoshua translated by Nicholas de Lange

(Doubleday, 309 pp., $24.95)

A. B. Yehoshua is a writer who continues to surprise. *A Journey to the End of the Millennium* is his second historical novel, but it could scarcely be more different—formally, stylistically, thematically—from its predecessor, *Mr. Mani*, which appeared in 1990. The earlier novel began in Israel in the present day, and moved backward by stages to the 1840s; its story was told almost entirely through dialogues that deleted the responses of the second speaker, and its primary concern was the historical project of Zionism and the ambiguities of Jewish identity. Yehoshua's new novel is set in the last months of the year 999, and it employs an impassive omniscient narrator who almost entirely excludes dialogue and who has (as I shall explain) a rather odd way of looking at things. Its plot turns on the conflict between Sephardic Jewry and Ashkenazic Jewry over the prohibition of polygamy.

The ban against polygamy was promulgated among the Jews of northern Europe around 950 by Gershom of Mayence, whose legal eminence earned him the epithet "Our Teacher Gershom, Luminary of the Exile." (This was not his only reform on behalf of Jewish women: he also ruled that a woman cannot be divorced against her will.) Gershom's ban against polygamy, which was influenced by the monogamous practice of Christian Europe, is the background for the clash between Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews that unfolds in Yehoshua's delightful novel. A native Israeli of Middle Eastern background, Yehoshua began his career in the late 1950s as an "assimilated" Sephardic writer, but with *The Lover* in 1977 he started to evince an interest in Sephardic character and in a Sephardic worldview, and these questions have exercised his imagination repeatedly ever since.

A Journey to the End of the Millennium is appropriately introduced inside the cover by a map, for it spans the known world of the time, like the Jewish mercantile activity of the era that is the motive for the journey in the novel. The principal character is Ben Attar, a Jewish merchant of Tangier who has entered into partnership with Abu Lutfi, an Arab, and with his own young nephew Abulafia. The nephew, after the suicide of his wife, evidently in despair over having given birth to a retarded daughter, exiles himself to France, where he engages in the lucrative marketing of goods from the Maghreb shipped to him by his two Moroccan partners. Each summer the three meet at a secluded spot outside Barcelona to divide the profits.

But this flourishing commercial fraternity is disrupted when Abulafia marries a strong-willed widow, Mistress Esther-Minna, emblematically blond and blue-eyed, from the sternly pious Jewry of the Rhineland. She is horrified to learn that her husband's uncle and partner has two wives, and she insists that Abulafia repudiate the partnership. It is Esther-Minna's reproving intervention that triggers the journey.

The journey itself, for all the persuasive details of carefully researched medieval life in which the novel abounds, exhibits from the start the lineaments of fantasy. Ben Attar packs his two wives onto a big-bellied Arab guard ship in order to display them before his new kinswoman as Exhibits A and B of the splendid viability of "dual love." He also hires a Sephardic rabbi of Seville, accompanied by his young son, to act as learned spokesman in the legal debate over the validity of polygamous unions. The complement of the ship, manned by Arabs and including the perplexed Abu Lutfi, is completed by an idol-worshipping black slave boy, who in the course of events stirs the erotic interest of both

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sexes, and, in the hold, surrounded by bags and chests of Moroccan merchandise, a pair of young camels, intended as still another exhibit of the charms of Mediterranean life.

The ship makes its way up the western coast of Europe and then eastward to the mouth of the Seine, and from there by river to the crude little Frankish town of Paris. Later an overland journey is required for a legal disputation about the legitimacy of bigamy in Esther-Minna's hometown of Worms on the Rhine. Beyond these peregrinations, we hear of Viking depredations, catch glimpses of Slavic slaves, and encounter a courier from the Holy Land. And over this geographical expanse, as the narrator coordinates dates on the calendars of the three faiths, looms the shadow of the impending millennium, when Christians expect the Savior's return, about which there is foreboding among those Europeans who have not embraced the Redeemer from Nazareth.

When I read Yehoshua's novel in Hebrew a year ago, there were incidents that seemed to me to strain historical plausibility. Now, reconsidering the book in Nicholas de Lange's wonderful translation, I am inclined to set aside the issue of historical likelihood, because the beguilements of this story strike me as flowing from something other than realism. The book should be described instead as a historical comedy of desire. I say a comedy, even though one important character dies unexpectedly, causing great grief, for three reasons: it intermittently proposes a droll perspective on the events that it recounts; it constantly evokes the pleasurable gratification of the senses; and it has a happy ending.

It must be conceded that the book's wry perspective is purchased at a cost, for we are kept throughout at a certain distance from the characters. Their feelings and their attitudes are refracted through the controlling narrator's concise summary, but we are not accorded much access to their inner lives. This decision is especially unusual for Yehoshua, who ever since *The Lover* has shown remarkable resourcefulness in deploying Faulkneresque interior monologues, and who has been above all a psychological novelist. Here, by contrast, a reader may have difficulty getting deeply engaged with individual characters. And this sense of distance is especially pronounced in Yehoshua's treatment of female characters. Ben Attar's two wives are referred to solely as "first wife" and "second wife," and they are chiefly differentiated as the plump older bedmate and the slim younger bedmate. It seems almost as though Yehoshua wanted to avoid the responsibilities of serious characterization, so as to employ the two figures as tokens in a parable of bigamy.

What is gained, though, is a panoramic overview of varieties of desire, a taxonomy of Jews, an introduction to the historical milieu and specifically to the cultural opposition between northern Europe and the Mediterranean world. Yehoshua's precision of notation is intertwined with a kind of deadpan whimsy that asks to be taken as part of the realistic report. On board the ship is "a fine silver basket replete with figs that had been picked and dried in Seville, on which lay a grilled fish that had been netted earlier in the night, its eye gleaming in the dark as though it were not yet reconciled to its death." Late in the novel, we encounter an unkosher counterpart to the animate grilled fish in a spit-roasted piglet "whose face still bore a pensive and melancholy air." Smells, to which considerable attention is devoted, display an altogether uncanny persistence in adhering to remote origins, as when the black slave boy seems to offer Ben Attar "consolation in the desert scent that rose from his body, a fragrance of dried thorns and smoke of ancient campfires, which the long ocean voyage and the additional journey overland had not been able to erase." Even a chunk of meat from a lamb stew "still smelled of sheep droppings."

There is an easy transition from this sort of fancifulness in description to a related quality in the represented action. Two Arab sailors, watching a Yom Kippur service, are "moved by the religious fervor of those around them to prostrate themselves on the ground in testimony to others and to themselves that they also had a prophet, who was all the younger and fresher for having come more recently." The strange-shaped Arab ship, converted from the purposes of war to those of trade, becomes, as it is glimpsed by lovers on the bank of the Seine, an image of the novel's fictional world: "as though this were not a real ship but a picture floating against the background of a dream that projected its wild fantasies for its own entertainment."

Those wild fantasies, it is clear from the first pages of the novel, originate in the overflowing fecundity of desire, which is the fundamental challenge to the new ban of the northern rabbis on multiple wives. The word "caress" appears in the first line of the novel; and in a nocturnal confusion emblematic of this world of polymorphous erotic perplexity, the caresser proves to be not at

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all the person imagined by Ben Attar. All flesh longs to caress and to be caressed, and the impulse extends beyond the human realm: soft winds caress the skin; the rabbi from Seville, thinking that he has found an ideal legal arbiter, feels as though his spirit "were being not merely touched but caressed by the good angel"; even the leather thongs of phylacteries, which cinch the flesh, are said to caress it. The very name of Abu Lutfi catches up this train of tactile associations, reminding the Hebrew reader, at least subliminally, of the word *letifah* or *lituf*, "caress," that recurs so often.

The only character who seems exempt from the impulsions of desire is Esther-Minna's puritanical bachelor brother, who is her principal ally in the struggle with their dark-skinned co-religionists from the south. Otherwise we see Abu Lutfi fancying the black slave, the rabbi from Seville secretly lusting after Ben Attar's wives, Abulafia confiding to his uncle about the nights of passion with his outwardly prim northern wife, and the exotic dark body of the young slave igniting a firestorm of concupiscence among the women in the home of a Christian artisan. The first northern Europeans spotted from the deck of the Arab guard ship are a pair of young lovers. Later, in a reflex characteristic of the novel's conception of the human predicament, the Iberian rabbi, coming upon two lovers in the streets of Paris late at night, is "tempted to approach them silently and perfume himself with their love." (The Hebrew verb for "perfume himself" has the idiomatic sense of "to become intoxicated," but Nicholas de Lange is probably right to preserve its sensuous immediacy by translating it literally.)

Ben Attar is the chief player, of course, in this comedy of desire. From the first scene of the novel, he is shown scurrying through the dark from the bed of his first wife to the bed of his second. It is hard to imagine that bigamy was very often practiced in such a symmetrically priapic fashion, but the sexually active forty-year-old—well on in years for a medieval man, as the narrator reminds us—has a point to prove. Though sexual longing does seem to well up in him with remarkable rapidity, he also feels the self-conscious need to satisfy both his wives equally and to realize repeatedly a unity of flesh and spirit with both of them, so as to demonstrate the perfect sustainability of bigamy as he prepares to confront his northern adversaries. When Ben Attar slips into the bed of the second wife, his body still bearing the scent of the first, "his heart swelled with dread, and also with excitement, at the thought of the horizons of desire that extended before the three of them."

As this mingling of fear and excitement may suggest, one of the constructions of the institution of bigamy with which Ben Attar's imagination plays is that it is a kind of sanctioned *ménage à trois*, "the secret that joined them in the perfection of a single love." In the

For Merrill

Time and time again the image would blur
Into focus: an old man would appear
And, white-haired, wiry, wrinkled, would *appear*
To wash his hands and face in the mirror.

Only something just never seemed to wash.
As time transpired, patches of steam would clear,
Revealing more, until it became clear
What didn't rinse was something one might squash

Into the pane, like a fly, and never
Realize that it and the glass came between
The figures, so that discrepancies between
What would be there, would be there—forever.

You awoke with a start but couldn't rise.
A dream now fading? All the more real then
As the room struggles to return to itself, then
Becomes all you desired (Proust's law applies)

The moment after which it meant something.
Losing touch with reality? It seems so.
Lately anyway. Everything seems so
Out of joint. At least there had been one thing

Which hadn't changed throughout it all until
Groping for the light switch, fading and sick,
You stumbled onto the *Ding an sich*:
Reality is that which resists the will.

Then suddenly everything became clearer:
Nothing you could recall was missing.
Translated this meant, if you weren't missing
The point completely, the man in the mirror

Reflected concerns which weren't there, though enough
Was still present to recall what you had lost.
Wondering once again what had happened, lost
In thought, you acknowledged this, then were off

To the runway where, as if knowing
It was time to clear the air, the plane flies
You further away, and the moments, Time's flies,
Splatter on its windshield—yes, you were going

To get better, or "not worse" it would seem,
To Greece, or Japan—it didn't matter
(You had given some thought to the matter)
In one sense at least. As far as the dream

Was concerned, *that* seemed very distant though.
There were places to see—this, that, the other.
This world was enough, who needed the other?
Something remained unwritten here below.

Steve Monte

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novel's last scene of conjugal intimacy, when the second wife is not there, the first wife actually experiences a hallucination of bodily merging with the absent spouse, "as though her two breasts ... were not only her own breasts but those of another woman, whose nipples and navel were fueling her own desire."

All this amounts not to psychology, but to a metapsychology of desire. It is on those odd and intriguing grounds, rather than through the expected exegesis of Talmudic ruling and biblical prooftext, that the two legal defenses of polygamy, one in France and the other in the Rhineland, are carried out by Ben Attar and his rabbinic spokesman. Some rather curious arguments are put forth—that a man, in cleaving ardently to his wife's flesh, runs the danger of taking on her femaleness, a danger averted when he has to shuttle between two women necessarily different in nature; that dual love, imposing some intermittence of union among the triangular partners, allows them to "digest thoroughly what they have been given before asking for more"; that our Ishmaelite cousins, seeing the Jews practice polygamy just as they do, will be more amenable to conversion when the redemption comes.

Yet the central argument for the moral and spiritual necessity of the second wife is based on the stubborn resistance of male desire—later in the book, its female counterpart will also be accorded a hearing—to its restriction to a single object. If there is no real second wife, the whimsical rabbi who is also something of a Hebrew poet contends, there is bound to be an imaginary second wife. And in her fantasized perfection, she can never be rivaled by the first wife, and a subversive current of resentment will enter the marriage. A second wife of flesh and blood, on the other hand, can be dealt with by her conjugal competitor, and in the best of circumstances can even be loved: "For only the second wife is able to alleviate the man's infinite, tormenting desire and transform it from reproof into pleasure."

Yehoshua has frequently evinced an attachment to psychoanalytical conceptions, not only in his fiction but also in his occasional forays into literary criticism. In *Open Heart*, his previous novel, the plot is founded on an explicitly Oedipal passion, imagined with compelling vividness, of a young man for a considerably older woman. Here, on the other hand, the more relevant Freud would be not the psychologist of individual attachments but the metapsychologist of *Civilization and its Discontents*. This is a sexy novel not out of lubricity of the imagination—the representations of sexual transactions are in fact whimsical, lyrical, or bemused—but because it raises the question of how unbounded desire can be fulfilled reasonably without tearing apart the framework of civilized life. The choice of the historical moment, with its clash between the two different Jewish systems, is crucial in this regard.

The imminent Christian millennium of the title is not intrinsically connected with the metapsychological theme. Its resonance in the novel derives from the eschatological expectations that are associated with it, with their dark intimation that Christian Europe may not be a hospitable place for Jews. Coincidentally, however, the millennial year marks a new epochal parting of the ways between Ashkenazic Jewry and Sephardic Jewry, arriving as it does so soon after the promulgation of Gershom's great reform. Yehoshua is of course working with a familiar stereotypical contrast between north and south, and one which is by no means limited to Jews: the repressed, puritanical, soul-pinched northerner against the spontaneous, sensual, hedonistic southerner. One thinks of the northerner Stendhal's repeated invocation, which he found in Goethe, of Italy and the amorous south as "the land where the orange tree grows."

Yehoshua's quizzical narrator mostly adopts the viewpoint on the north of his inter-ethnic band of Mediterraneans. A certain defamiliarizing of the European scene is thus effected, in the manner, say, of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, as when the black pagan prostrates himself in a church "before the image of a gilded man spreading his arms out like a bat's wings behind the altar." Northern Europe in these waning months of 999, as summer rapidly gives way to the first intimations of the great descending chill, is generally a dour place: dark-timbered, rough-hewn houses instead of the gleaming white stucco and the architectural elegance of Cordova and Tangier; a faith that promises imminent redemption but also darkly hints of wholesale bloodshed; a pious practice among Christians and Jews that is uncompromising and austere. Ben Attar and his companions are keenly curious about these pale-skinned Jews "who may have had some Viking or Saxon blood in their veins" and whose very ancestral bond with the Land of Israel is open to doubt. In the heart of the alien north, his imagination flashes back on images of sun-drenched landscapes, olive trees and citrus groves, and the measured delights of moving, without guilt or rebuke, between first wife and second, each comfortably nested in her own domicile amid cushions and sumptuous carpets.

Against the background of these large contrasts, the sanctioning of dual love bespeaks a culture that is prepared to accommodate the irrepressible nature of desire. It is a culture, the novel suggests, that Jews and the West have marginalized at a considerable human cost. Eros, cramped and hobbled, turns corrosive or explodes. In place of the tragic plot of adultery leading to violent death, the plot that became so familiar from the classic European novel, *A Journey to the End of the Millennium* conjures up an alluring comic fantasy of repeated sexual adventure flowing through double channels within the institution of marriage itself.

Yehoshua is not proposing, of course, a practical program for a return to polygamy. He seems perfectly happy to be the heir of Gershom of Mayence. What his novel charmingly evokes instead is a vision of cultural alternatives, the beckoning possibility of a more relaxed arrangement of faith and society that might ease the chafing, and maybe even mitigate civilization's discontents.

ROBERT ALTER's *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* will be published by Norton in the fall.

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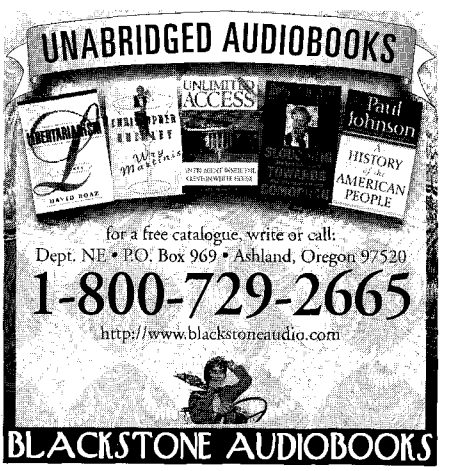

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NEW YORK DIARIST

Uma and me

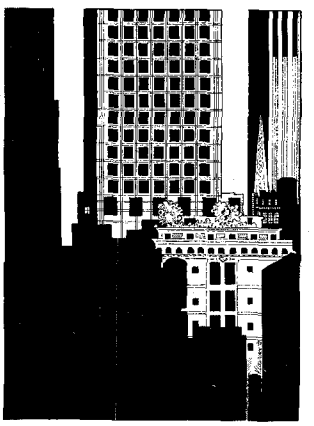
UMA THURMAN RECENTLY BLEW into town to appear in an off-Broadway production of Molière's *The Misanthrope*, and my old ache came to life. It was time for a reckoning. You see, I never made love with Uma. Never even kissed her or held her hand. I have a lump in my throat as I write this. Uma, Uma, Uma. Proust had his madeleine, and I have the odd, exotic, simple name. No, I am not having a nervous breakdown. Obviously, if that was the case, I would be saving it for a book, or possibly a larger project involving dance and moving text.

FOR A LONG TIME, I HEARD THE name Uma or said it to myself, and I was plagued by remorse. But I did not feel remorseful because I had done something bad. I felt remorseful because I had not done something naughty. In our culture of limitless change and opportunity, I did not take what was offered to me. In the single grain of an afternoon with Uma, I could have seized the universe. But I strayed from the broad and winding path of pleasure, I violated my potential, I traduced my ambition. For a long time, I believed that I had failed myself.

IN MY YOUNGER YEARS, I ONCE worked for a Manhattan agency that placed tutors with children working in the arts and other professions. That's how one hazy, narcotic spring day I found myself alone with Uma in her Chelsea apartment. She was about 16 and seemed to be entirely on her own. I was about a decade older than she was and a graduate student in literature. Uma's regular tutor was sick—probably with the highest fever in history—and I was summoned by the agency to take his place for an afternoon.

I WAS SUPPOSED TO TEACH UMA "The Waste Land." Yes, "The Waste Land." She loved the poem, she said, and told me that her favorite line was the poem's last, "Shantih shantih shantih." It is a Sanskrit word that means "the peace that passeth understanding," as Eliot tells us in a famous footnote.

I HAVE GOT TO BE VIVID ABOUT this so as to convince you of the condition that once ensnared me. Uma was a model at the time I met her, not yet famous. She had an open face and slightly swelled features and pale blue eyes that seemed wide with surprise and also moist with deep recognition of the nature of their surprise. Just hanging out, she looked like she was on the brink of physical ecstasy. She seemed to be willing her inwardness out through her pores, all for the pleasure of others. She was magnetic, enchanting, incredible. And she began to flirt with me. Putting her cat provocatively in her lap, she stroked it and described a suggestive fantasy to me. You'll just have to take my word for it that things were getting serious. At least give me the benefit of the doubt. Yet, sitting before this golden, lissome creature, I had an experience that was soon to take on the dimensions of trauma. I was not aroused.



THERE WERE STRETCHes of time when Uma did not make any films. Those were the good years. I could forget. I fell in love with a wise and beautiful woman, and we married. I started to make a career for myself. I enjoyed life. And then, suddenly, calamity would descend. It was like an air raid. Uma on the sides of buses, Uma on subway posters, Uma on the television, Uma in the magazines, Uma everywhere. The culture offered her up, and the nation aspired toward her. And so I was unremittingly informed that I had not only failed myself. I had failed my country and my culture.

I REFUSED TO GO TO UMA'S movies. I snickered to my skeptical wife that I preferred actresses whose looks did not interfere so tragically with their performances. Only once did I yield. I sneaked into a theater one weekday afternoon to catch a matinee showing of *Pulp Fiction*. But, though I tried and I tried, I still was not aroused. I developed such a pounding headache that I could not hear the gunshots or the cries of pain on the screen. I fled the theater. From then on, it was no more films with Uma. Not even the occasional effort with a rental. Our screen is too small, anyway.

I AM HEADING TOWARD SOMEthing substantial, don't worry. I have a large and serious point to make. The night before going to the play, I reread Molière's original version. His misanthrope is Alceste, who detests the hypocrisy around him and tells people what he really thinks about them. He is always right, and he is always obnoxiously wrong. He lays about with that conceited and aggrieved honesty which ruins a large truth for the sake of standing firm on a small one. He does not understand, for instance, that love is a larger truth than some isolated accuracy about the beloved. Vanity and distracted ambition fashion his idea of truth. This is why Alceste's passion for the promiscuous and sought-after Célimène, a nasty though keenly insightful gossip, is so comically self-deluded. Alceste does not really love her or really desire her, as she and others observe. He loves the world's love that is embodied in this glamorous cynosure. He wills himself toward her, drawn on by the very same worldly opinion he disdains. In other words, he is not aroused. But he thinks he ought to be.

THE PLAY WAS ALIVE in my mind the next morning when serendipity struck. In the newspaper, I discovered an article about a recent University of Chicago sex study (an oxymoron if ever there was one). Alarm bells are ringing. A large percentage of American men and women are not, among other aberrations, as sexually aroused as they would like to be. As the sides of buses, as the subway posters, as the television, as the magazines tell them they should be. At the University of Chicago, researchers are profoundly worried.

I SAT IN THE THEATER THAT NIGHT watching the stunning Uma play Jennifer, the Célimène character in this version. I had the impression that we exchanged a glance, and I relished my non-arousal. I thought of all the men and women across the country not perpetually aroused yet weaving their lives through their loves and into and around their secrets in spite of the dread disorder. Those dumb researchers. They do not understand that the truth of love and sex is larger than some isolated clinical accuracy about sex. No wonder no one in the audience laughed at Alceste. Society itself has become Alcestian, misanthropic. Our experts, in cahoots with our captains of official pleasure, ruin large human truths for the sake of small and petty ones. They are so unforgiving. But that night, I forgave myself. I felt reprieved by my own nature. Hooray for sublimation! Long live Eros, builder of cities, creator of essays and shorter pieces! Uma, thank you for this inestimable gift. Shantih, baby, shantih.

LEE SIEGEL

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Who is Left?

The absence of a left on the radar screen of American politics is one of the wonders of the age. What happened to all those activists who went to war against the System in the 1960s, and who took to the streets to promote the West's defeat in the Cold War? How is it that our universities boast more socialists and kitsch marxists than the former satellites of the now defunct Soviet bloc? Who organizes the party line that promotes the rhetoric of class, race and gender warfare in national political debates?

We think the list below is the beginning of an answer. Everybody agrees there is a Right in American politics, and everybody thinks they can name the players. We think it is time to take a balanced view of the political process and identify the political left.

Who are the left? Socialists, "progressives," gender feminists, critical race theorists, "critical" theorists of all stripes, opponents of welfare reform, proponents of an expanding welfare state, members of the coalition to lynch Clarence Thomas and also to save Bill Clinton, tax-the-rich ideologues, Christian-haters and PLO-supporters, reflexive bashers of white Americans and America-haters in general.

And: anyone who uses the term "oppression" to describe any set of social relations in America today. And: any knee-jerk name-caller who responds to this list by invoking the specter of Joseph McCarthy, which is the left's favorite tactic for closing debate on its political agendas.

NATIONAL FIGURES: Hillary Rodham Clinton, Jesse Jackson, Marion Wright Eddman, Sydney Blumenthal, John Sweeney, Julian Bond

SENATORS: Paul Wellstone, Ted Kennedy, Barbara Boxer, Christopher Dodd, Pat Leahy, Dianne Feinstein, Tom Harkin, Robert Torricelli

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ORGANIZATIONS: Earth First!, National Lawyers Guild, American Civil Liberties Union, Children's Defense Fund, NAACP, NEA, People for the American Way, National Organization for Women, Democratic Socialists of America

INSTITUTIONS: MALDEF, MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, Asner Family Foundation, Emily's List, Feminist Majority Foundation, Institute for Policy Studies

IDEOLOGUES: Noam Chomsky, Betty Friedan, Catharine MacKinnon, Derrick Bell, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Cornel West, Howard Zinn

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